

THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN BEFORE THE ITALIAN ANNOUNCEMENT THAT IT WILL NOT ATTEND DURBAN.

FOLLOWING CANADA, ISRAEL, AND THE UNITED STATES.

THE ITALIAN STATEMENT OPENS THE WAY FOR A WIDER EUROPEAN WALKOUT, WITH BRITAIN, HOLLAND, DENMARK, AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC AS LIKELY CANDIDATES.

Analysis: Will the conference be delegitimized?

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Gerald Steinberg , [THE JERUSALEM POST](#)

What if the UN gave an Israel-bashing party and nobody came?

While this is only one possible scenario for the Durban Review Conference scheduled to begin on April 20 in Geneva, it is not a total fantasy.

The potential for a tipping point came after the Obama administration sent a delegation to examine the options for changing the conference text, and returned - predictably - empty-handed.

A State Department official acknowledged that "The document being negotiated has gone from bad to worse, and the current text of the draft outcome document is not salvageable.

"A conference based on this text would be a missed opportunity to speak clearly about the persistent problem of racism."

Having made the effort, the US announced that it would not attend, more than a year after the Canadian government (and a few months after

Israel) reached the same conclusion.

If the European governments, as well as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and India also refuse to join another antisemitic and anti-democratic UN event using the façade of fighting racism, the room will be largely empty.

Officials from Libya, Iran, Syria and Egypt will repeat their denunciations, Holocaust denial, and diatribes against free speech and religious freedom (under the guise of opposition to Islamophobia), to members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Arab League, and perhaps a few African and other countries in the OIC orbit.

In the galleries, officials from politicized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may take up some seats, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, FIDH (from France), and their Palestinian partners.

The images from a largely empty conference hall will contrast strongly with the original UN Durban Conference on racism and discrimination, held in September 2001. In addition to the governmental meeting, an NGO Forum with 4,000 participants adopted a strategy of anti-Israel demonization, based on the rhetoric of "apartheid" and calls for boycotts, arms embargoes, and isolation.

While many of the participants, including HRW and Amnesty, continue to promote this campaign, others, such as Human Rights First, have stayed away. In addition, the Ford Foundation, which funded much of 2001's disastrous event, has refused support for a repeat performance.

However, the encouraging signs notwithstanding, it is too early to declare victory regarding the Review Conference. As long as the European governments waver, and the post-colonial and often antisemitic NGO network is involved, preparations will continue for presenting a strong counter-voice in Geneva.

A media strategy is necessary for journalists who will be creating the perceptions and determining the impact of this event, and who know little about the details. Events outside the UN building involving victims of racism, such as the Roma, the Dalits in India, and victims of genocidal attacks in Darfur, whose voices were silenced by the anti-Israel obsession in Durban, will contrast the substance of human rights with the façade.

In parallel, Israeli officials must continue to press Europe to take a moral position against this abuse of human rights. In 2001, when the US and Israel walked out of the Durban governmental conference in protest, the Europeans did not join them.

Then, as now, the humanitarian aid arms of European governments, including the EU, Norway and Switzerland, bankroll some of the most virulent anti-Israel and anti-peace NGOs involved in the Durban strategy. In most cases, their parliaments and media are unaware of this annual abuse of taxpayer funds.

There are some encouraging signs of change in Europe - officials in Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and the Czech Republic have stated that they are considering non-participation in Durban II. The 125 MPs from 40 countries attended the London Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Anti-Semitism, resolved to prevent "the institutions of the international community" from working "to establish any legitimacy for anti-Semitism, including the singling out of Israel for discriminatory treatment ... [A]nd we will never witness - or be party to - another gathering like Durban in 2001."

The next two weeks will be crucial in determining whether these words will be turned into deeds.

If the Review Conference ends in a farce or does not take place, this will mark a victory in one of the many battles in this "soft-power war."

The UN Human Rights Council - which is responsible for organizing the Durban conferences and related events - is a central battlefield, and the Obama administration has announced that it will return to the HRC as an observer, following the Bush administration's disengagement.

On this battlefield, strong and consistent voices from Canada, the US and perhaps Europe are essential to make a long-term change.

The results of the conflicts over Durban, the UNHRC, among the radical NGOs, and elsewhere will decide whether the universal moral foundations of human rights can be restored after years of abuse.

In addition, any hopes for peace negotiations brokered by George Mitchell, Tony Blair, and others, hinge on ending the political warfare from Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian Authority, and the Arab League.

As these events demonstrate, the Durban strategy and serious peace efforts are entirely incompatible.

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