# **US Doesn’t Support UN Plan to Hold Durban III Next Year**

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A commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Durban I antiracism event is slated to take place in September 2011 at UN headquarters in New York, a source familiar with the plans told *The Jerusalem Post*on Wednesday.

But Patrick Ventrell, a spokesman for the US Mission to the UN, told the *Post*on Thursday, “The US does not support the decision to hold the 10th anniversary of the Durban I Conference in New York City in September 2011. We do not believe it would be an appropriate time and venue.”

According to the UN insider, “Negotiators Tuesday spent time arguing about the date. Western states tried to object to September 21 on the basis that there were plans for other events already that day and GA [General Assembly] resolutions are never specific about dates so the issue should be left to future negotiations.”

Next year’s conference is intended to honor the initial Durban I event in South Africa and the follow-up Durban II review conference in Geneva last year.

Officially known as the World Conference against Racism 2001, Durban I was marred by anti-Semitism and attacks on Israel’s right to exist. Last year’s Durban II showcased Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s tirades against Israel as well as his denial of the Holocaust.

According to Natalie Kohli, senior adviser for the UN’s Human Rights Council Review, opposition to the commemoration is expected from the US, Israel, Canada, Australia and others.

Belgium is taking a lead role in negotiating on behalf of the 27 European Union countries regarding Durban III.

The *Post* learned that South Africa is pushing for a September 21, 2011, date, when most heads of state would be in New York for the annual session of the US General Assembly.

When asked whether Germany planned to participate in the Durban commemoration event, a German Foreign Ministry spokesman told the *Post* via e-mail on Tuesday, “The discussions on the annual UN anti-racism resolution and the questions raised in this connection regarding a commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Durban conference are currently still taking place in New York. Therefore, the outcome of the discussions cannot be anticipated at this time.”

The spokesman added, “The federal government is working actively within the UN against the misuse of the justified issue of the international fight against racism. This is also its position during the current negotiations.”

After considerable public pressure and media editorials urging Germany to boycott Durban II in 2009, then-foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier pulled the plug on Germany’s involvement in the Geneva Durban II event at the eleventh hour.

Anne Bayefsky, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and an expert on international human rights law, told the *Post*on Wednesday that the German Foreign Ministry’s statement was “shockingly misleading.”

“Last year, Germany voted against the resolution which decided specifically to hold a ‘Durban III,’ which nevertheless passed handily,” Bayefsky said. “Last year’s resolution also decided the event would be held in September 2011 in New York City, and would be scheduled during the opening days of the General Assembly so that heads of state and of government could be pressured into coming.

“The bottom line is, Germany has followed the decision to hold Durban III and the process of fleshing out the event details closely,” she said. “It is fully aware of precisely what can be anticipated from the current negotiations, since it knows full well that those meetings are fiddling at the edges and have no bearing whatsoever on the decision to have the event, which has already been made. Germany voted with their feet at Durban II, and voted against the resolution on Durban III last year.

“So why is Germany feigning ignorance days before they have to cast a vote on the details of the same meeting to which they objected the year before? Germany knows that Iranian President Ahmadinejad opened Durban II and that he will certainly come to Durban III along with his usual participation at the opening of the General Assembly.

“Is Germany going to stand side-by-side with a Holocaust denier having genocidal ambitions and claim this is the right forum by which to combat racism and xenophobia?” Bayefsky asked.

In an e-mail to the *Post*on Wednesday, Bart Ouvry, a spokesman for Belgium’s Foreign Ministry, wrote, “On racism issues Belgium has very often acted as ‘burden sharer’ for the European Union within the UN. This implied that we negotiate with other UN member states in both Geneva and New York on behalf of the European Union.”

Ouvry added, “Specifically on Durban the EU has strived to avoid any unhelpful country references in the conclusions of the meeting, including references to Israel. At the first Durban review conference in Geneva the EU largely succeeded in avoiding this with the exception of a general reference to the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted in Durban. The impact and importance of the review conference cannot be compared to a fullfledged UN conference such as the Durban Conference.”

Asked about Belgium’s refusal to pull out of the Durban II event, Ouvry noted that “Belgium as other EU member states left the room during President Ahmadinejad’s speech at the Durban review conference. A limited number of EU member states decided to leave the conference as such in the course of the proceedings. Belgium and a large majority of other EU member states decided to continue its participation.”

Ouvry declined to comment on the EU position on Durban III, saying, “I believe negotiations are still under way and I cannot comment on final Belgian or European positions at this stage.”

Responding to Ouvry’s statements, Bayefsky told the *Post* that some EU states had opted not to participate in Durban II before Ahmadinejad speech.

Those states, Bayefsky said, “did not leave only as a consequence of Ahmadinejad. They pulled out in advance because they recognized that the Durban Declaration and its followup processes harm the cause of combating racism...”

As for Belgium’s continued participation at Durban II, “That’s what majorities have said to minority victims of xenophobia and racism throughout the ages – the numbers do not make it right,” Bayefsky said.

She challenged the Belgian Foreign Ministry’s assertion about the EU “striving to avoid any unhelpful country references,” criticizing Ouvry sharply and saying it was “like referring to reaffirmation of Durban Declarations as just a small ‘exception,’ not the only thing that matters since it was the Durban Declaration which singles out and demonizes Israel.”

Bayefsky said Belgium was pushing the Durban Declaration against Israel and the commemoration event.

If Belgium sought to fight racism, “there would be no need to make any mention of the Durban Declaration. They could adopt a statement against racism and refer to the convention on the elimination of all forms racial discrimination,” she said.

Leaders of pro-Israel NGOs said they were appalled at the UN’s planned commemoration of Durban.

“Any celebration of the UN’s notorious 2001 Durban conference, the iconic symbol of globalized anti-Western and anti- Israel hatred, is nothing but a political provocation designed by barbarous regimes to project their own atrocities onto the world’s democracies,” said Hillel Neuer, executive director of Geneva-based UN Watch.

“UN Watch is urging the US and the European Union to mobilize as many countries as possible to oppose the Durban III resolution,” Neuer said. “If it’s only tyrants, misogynists and racists supporting the event – like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan – it will carry little legitimacy worldwide.

“While we pray that this circus of propaganda will not take place, its proponents should recall that their 2009 Durban II conference in Geneva was defeated. Major countries pulled out, embarrassing the organizers,” Neuer said. “Fearing that even more would pull out, the UN dropped all express references to Israel or to the so-called ‘defamation of Islam.’

“Significantly, UN Watch and its allies brought thousands of activists to a series of megaevents that seized the public space, captured international attention and reframed the narrative,” he said. “The real champions of human rights owned the streets. If Durban III is convened, UN Watch will once again take vigorous action to thwart the attempt of anti-democratic, anti-Western and anti- Israel forces to recreate the hatred of the 2001 Durban conference in the streets of New York.”

“Tragically, Durban I emphasized the exploitation of universal human rights as a weapon against Israel,” said Gerald Steinberg, president of NGO Monitor. “The [conference’s] NGO forum allowed 1,500 organizations, led by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, to hijack the rhetoric of moral values, marking the initiation of lawfare, BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions], and ‘apartheid’ language that stands in stark contrast to an environment needed for peace in the region.”

Anti-Defamation League National Director Abraham Foxman told the *Post* that the UN’s prospective commemoration was “outrageous and shameful.

“The Durban conference notoriously became a vehicle to promote anti-Semitism and incite hatred against Israel,” Foxman said, adding that Durban I “marked the start of a new chapter in the efforts to use UN forums and mechanisms to vilify Israel and the Jewish people.

“It represented a colossal failure of the international community to prevent the perversion of a UN conference designed to address the scourge of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and all forms of intolerance,” Foxman said.

The UN, he said, “should not continue to bring attention to the Durban hatefest."

“No amount of follow up conferences will be able to paper over the damage caused by that anti-Jewish spectacle,” Foxman said.