# France to boycott UN anti-racism conference, citing previous antisemitism

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French President Emmanuel Macron will boycott a United Nations conference on the fight against racism next month over concerns about “antisemitic statements” at previous editions, the presidency said on Friday.

The follow-up meeting of the Durban Conference, named after the South African city where the first edition was held in 2001, is scheduled to bring together world leaders on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September.

But the format has been controversial since its inception, with critics, led by Israel, charging that the first edition in Durban was tarnished by virulent and undisguised antisemitism.

Several countries, including France, also boycotted follow-up meetings in 2009 and 2011.

The United States, Canada, the UK, Australia, Israel and numerous other European countries have already announced they are boycotting this year’s meeting.

The French presidency said in a statement that Macron “has decided that France will not take part in the follow-up conference due to take place this year as he is concerned by antisemitic statements made within the Durban Conference.”

The first Durban conference — held from August 31 to September 8, 2001, just days before the terror attacks of September 11 — was marked by deep divisions on the issues of antisemitism, colonialism and slavery.

Western countries believe that criticism of Israel and its occupation of the Palestinian territories frequently veered into open antisemitism.

The US and Israel walked out of the conference in protest at the tone of the meeting, including over plans to include condemnations of Zionism in the final text.

At the 2009 conference, a speech by Iran’s then-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attacking Israel sparked a temporary walkout by many European delegates.

“France will continue to fight against all forces of racism and will be watching to make sure that the Durban follow-up conference is held in accordance with the founding principles of the United Nations,” the French presidency said.

Macron has vowed to fight against antisemitism in all its forms and last year warned of “the unbearable resurgence of antisemitism in our Europe.”

The French government has in recent days expressed concern over antisemitic slogans at [protests](https://www.timesofisrael.com/frenchwoman-faces-antisemitism-trial-over-sign-calling-prominent-jews-traitors/) against COVID-19 restrictions.

Last month, President Isaac Herzog said the upcoming conference was “a gathering of hatred and slander, an antisemitic event in the worst sense.”

Herzog called for countries and organizations to join together by acting “decisively, unanimously, and fearlessly” against the Durban IV conference to ensure it does not take place.