Why Durban IV must be boycotted - opinion

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By Bernard-Henri Levy

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Something shameful is in the works.

It’s the UN General Assembly’s plan to mark the [20th anniversary of the Durban Conference](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/australia-wont-go-to-anti-israel-durban-conference-prime-minister-says-667407), on September 22.

What was the Durban Conference?

On paper, it was the name of a UNESCO conference held in the eponymous city in South Africa, at which the world was supposed to recommit to the fight against “racism, xenophobia and intolerance.”

But in reality, it was the occasion of an inexcusable three-faceted failure.

First, as soon as the Palestinian question took center stage (which was very early on), the stigmatization of Israel became the leitmotif of the proceedings.

Yasser Arafat denounced “apartheid.”

Fidel Castro feigned alarm at a “genocide.”

The sinister 1974 resolution equating Zionism with “racism” was resurrected, despite having been repealed in 1991.

The struggle against “occupation” was turned into the mother of all present and future political battles.

And some of the six thousand NGO representatives invited to the event slid easily from rabid anti-Zionism to good old-fashioned antisemitism.

Jewish delegates were insulted.

People wearing yarmulkes were threatened, harried by cries that they “didn’t belong to the human race.”

Stands sprang up selling The Protocols of the Elders of Zion in various languages.

Demonstrations led by groups of radical Islamists, with whom antiglobalists militants did not seem to mind mingling, marched to shouts of “One Jew, One Bullet” behind placards proclaiming that Hitler should have “finished the job.”

It was Act I of neo-antisemitism. Never had we witnessed its full expression on such a scale and with such dark force.

SECOND, these appalling acts were billed as anti-racist.

The perpetrators hid under the protective umbrella of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and other icons of anti-colonialism.

Of course, deceased giants cannot be held responsible for the misuse of their names by small men still living.

And I am not among those who believe that the noble cause of combating racism can be defeated by these cynical misappropriations.

But who can deny that it was seriously desecrated? Sullied? Even corrupted?

It is hard to avoid thinking: the demonstrators, through their actions, broke the essential living link – a link almost sacred – between contemporary anti-racism and the activists, Jewish and non-Jewish, who fought for civil rights in America 40 years ago.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion: upon the ruins of the solidarity of the shaken, upon that field of ideological battle where the descendants of slaves were pitted against those of the Holocaust, amid the new confusion that was effacing the noble idea that the memory of the camps serves, in Walter Benjamin’s words, as a “fire alarm” to warn us, before it is too late, of the possible return of the worst, the light of universal anti-racism began to dim.

Eight years after Durban I, we had Durban II, chaired by Colonel Gaddafi.

And three years after that, in 2011, Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spouted his negationist nonsense at Durban III.

At the end of this path lay the sharp turn toward anti-racism in its racialist, nativist and woke incarnations. It’s so clear, suddenly: that form of anti-racism was born in Durban.

THIRD, Durban was the stage for yet another disgrace, and it was not the least of them.

As chance would have it, I was working at the time on a series of reports on “forgotten wars” for France’s newspaper of record, Le Monde.

I had met and interviewed people for whom the struggle against racism, discrimination and slavery were not idle words.

I had been impressed by the hope with which they went off to the conference, having heard that it would be a forum for survivors and their unacknowledged suffering.

But, lo!, shortly after arriving at Durban, they learned that there was in this world only one enslaved people, the Palestinians.

They were told that only the Palestinians were suffering discrimination on a scale meriting the attention of the international community.

And they understood that the Tutsi victims of Hutu racism; the caravans of South Sudanese women and children rounded up like cattle to be sold to Arab families in the north; the Nuba women branded and transformed into sex slaves; the millions of dead in the Angolan war; the victims of the genocide in Darfur; the Sri Lankans trapped between the flames of Hindu and Buddhist fundamentalism; the Uighurs, Indian Dalits and other untouchables – they understood that all these people were, if not completely silenced, at any rate excluded from the grand narrative being put in place.

“Down, wretched of the earth!” was the message.

Crawl back into the shadows!

No one can join the victims’ club unless they can claim a role in the war against the American master and its Israeli servant.

What despair for all those thus banished and cast adrift!

Three birds with one stone.

A triple crime against the Jews, against the human spirit and against entire peoples whose pain counted for nothing and who were sent back to nothing.

To commemorate that would be a disgrace – for all the foregoing reasons.

The only worthy stance to take, when the new conference of shame opens on September 22, is to [join the boycott announced](https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/germany-will-boycott-the-durban-iv-conference-674831) by the United States, Canada, Germany, Israel, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, among others.

It’s now, thanks to president Macron, the position of France.