Canada Wavers on Anti-Semitic UN Durban Conference Anniversary Commemoration

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The United Nations plans to celebrate this September the twentieth anniversary of its so-called “World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance” held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. The Durban Declaration and Program of Action served as the conference’s agreed-upon output. The 2001 conference, and the two that followed in 2009 and 2011, turned out to be nothing more than global platforms for the world’s most vicious anti-Semites, such as Iran’s former President Ahmadinejad, to engage in blood libel against the Jewish State of Israel. Charges of racism and apartheid were leveled at Israel by the Palestinians and their enablers who themselves are guilty of racism and ethnic cleansing.

The three Durban conferences and the Durban Declaration and Program of Action collectively represented a very dark chapter in UN history. They are the evil progenies of the 1975 “Zionism-is-Racism” General Assembly resolution that was revoked by the General Assembly in 1991. Now the UN is planning a Durban IV conference to commemorate what it should be consigning to an ignoble burial.

Sadly, the United States and Canada, which have condemned and boycotted past Durban conferences, appear to be equivocating this time. They co-signed a Joint Statement on Racism dated March 19, which shamefully linked the cause of anti-racism to the Durban Declaration and Program of Action. In fact, the Biden administration’s representative to the Israel-bashing UN Human Rights Council, which the administration intends to rejoin, introduced the joint statement on behalf of 155 UN member states.

“Recalling the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action,” the joint statement said, “we are committed to working within our nations and with the international community to address and combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, while upholding freedom of expression.”

A declaration and program of action borne out of a racist, anti-Semitic conference should not be associated with any genuine international effort to combat racism.

Anne Bayefsky, director of the Touro Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust and president of Human Rights Voices, hit exactly the right note in her remarks to the UN Human Rights Council on March 19th. She said:

“Antisemites manufacture tools to spread intolerance by manipulating current events, appropriating the history of others, inverting right and wrong. Durban is such a tool. It perversely claims equality for some can be built on the inequality of the Jewish few – and specifically on the lethal lie that Palestinians are victims of Israeli racism…”

Prior to the Biden administration, presidents from both parties shunned any association with the Durban conferences. But now that Biden is so much in love with the United Nations and multilateralism for multilateralism’s sake, he appears willing to join the anti-Israel club and throw the U.S.’s most reliable ally in the Middle East under the bus.

After the first Durban conference in 2001, the Canadian government boycotted the subsequent conferences because of their anti-Semitic tilt. For example, Pierre Poilievre, who was then the parliamentary secretary to former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, delivered the following remarks at the “Counter Durban” conference against racism, discrimination, and persecution in Geneva on April 22, 2009:

“Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s attendance at the Durban II Conference this past Monday, and his offensive tirade, only made more obvious what was so apparent to Canada a long time ago—that this event was the exact inverse of what it purported to be.”

*“And all the while, Durban II perversely ignores actual racism and human rights abuses elsewhere.”*

“While time has run out to prevent Durban II from performing an injustice to the UN’s reputation, we must stand strong and protest. I am tremendously proud of the fact that our Government has been a true global leader in voicing opposition to Durban II. In fact, it was in January of 2008—almost 16 months ago to the day—that Canada was the first country to withdraw from Durban II.”

### **Trudeau administration is punting**

Former Immigration Minister Jason Kenney vowed that Canada would not attend Durban III in 2011, intended to mark the 10th anniversary of the first 2001 Durban conference, because the Canadian government expected the event to turn into a “charade” and a “hatefest.” Kenney added that the Durban process “commemorates an agenda that actually promotes racism rather than combats it.” He was right then and would be right now in taking the same position. Nothing has changed about the Durban conferences. But the change in the party running the Canadian government appears to have made a difference in how Canada views the Durban conferences. Canada’s once implacable opposition to the Durban agenda is morphing into a willingness to sign a statement recalling the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action.

Pierre Poilievre is now a distinguished member of Parliament and a fierce critic of Prime Minister Trudeau. While he made clear to me in a recent interview that he had nothing to say regarding the Joint Statement on Racism or the Trudeau administration’s decision to sign it, MP Poilievre noted that after the 2019 election Trudeau’s Liberal Party gave up any pretense of standing in Israel’s corner. It “betrayed Israel and broke ten years of promises to pander to elite, leftwing international opinion,” MP Poilievre said.

I asked for Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Marc Garneau’s comment on whether Canada is now willing to participate in any future Durban-related conferences against racism, including the UN’s upcoming twentieth anniversary commemoration, after having boycotted the last two Durban conferences. Here is the verbatim response I received from the Canadian Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson:

“We understand that while there are discussions taking place on a potential conference, there are no concrete details as of now. Canada will continue to monitor any developments. Canada remains committed, at home and internationally, to advancing human rights, inclusion and combatting systemic racism and antisemitism in all its forms.”

In other words, the Trudeau administration is punting. It is waiting to take stock of the so-called international community “consensus” and what the Biden administration intends to do before making its own final decision. But the fact that both the Biden and Trudeau administrations signed the Joint Statement on Racism referencing the twentieth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action in a positive context is disgraceful enough.