US pulls out of Durban anti-racism meet up, is Australia next?

May 4, 2021

By Naomi Levin, Tzvi Fleischer

Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council

<https://aijac.org.au/fresh-air/us-pulls-out-of-durban-anti-racism-meet-up-is-australia-next/>

As countries prepare to officially mark the 20th anniversary of a 2001 United Nations conference notorious for its extreme antisemitism, the United States has made the principled decision not to participate.

It is anticipated that other countries, Australia included, may consider following suit.

Held in the South African coastal city of Durban, the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance produced a conference declaration that singled out Israel alone for criticism, out of all the world’s nations. It was preceded by an NGO sideshow event where virulent antisemitic behaviour was widespread, facilitated by the organisers. The situation became so dire that Jewish participants had to be accompanied by additional security to ensure their personal safety at the conference.

The overall event, which became colloquially known as Durban I, was a watershed in the long and dishonourable history of the UN being manipulated to discredit Israel, the world’s sole Jewish state.

According to a[report in the Jerusalem Post](https://www.jpost.com/bds-threat/state-dept-us-will-not-take-part-in-durban-iv-conference-667103), the United States has decided it will not participate in the 20th anniversary event planned for September 22, 2021. A spokesperson told the Israeli publication: “the United States stands with Israel and has always shared its concerns over the Durban process’s anti-Israel sentiment, use as a forum for antisemitism and freedom of expression issues.”

Since 2001, there have been two follow up conferences, in 2009 and 2011. In both instances, there were few attempts to right the wrongs of Durban I. In both instances, the United States, Australia, and a small group of similarly minded truly anti-racist countries, boycotted.

At the conclusion of Durban I, Australia’s then-foreign minister Alexander Downer noted there was language in the conference declaration “with which we could not be associated”.

Australia did not send a delegation in 2009, when then-Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was a welcomed speaker, despite having called for Israel to be “wiped off the map” and denying the Holocaust.

In 2011, the Australian Government participated in early discussions, but soon withdrew. Then-prime minister Julia Gillard noted she had “not been convinced that the high-level meeting will avoid unbalanced criticism of Israel and the airing of anti-Semitic views.”

The Australian Government under Prime Minister Scott Morrison has already flagged its concern with the 20th anniversary event.

In December 2020, Australia joined other countries, including the US and Israel, in voting against a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a one-day high-level meeting to be held in September 2021 to mark 20 years since Durban I. The resolution said the conference would mobilise “political will” for “the full and effective implementation of the Durban Declaration”, indicating no change or improvement of the deeply problematic 2001 conference outcome was contemplated.

Having strongly stood up against this disgraceful and self-defeating attempt at anti-racism over the past 20 years, it would be wholly consistent if Australia decided to boycott once again.