



E– Bulletin for NGOs on the Durban Review Conference

This new series of E-bulletins is issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide regular updates and guidance for NGOs in the lead up to and the post Durban Review Conference, which took place in Geneva from 20 to 24 April 2009.

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In 2001, the United Nations organized the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. The conference was attended by more than 10,000 people from all regions of the world and led to the adoption by consensus of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which to date is the most important framework in the combat against racism and racial discrimination. In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 61/49, decided to convene in 2009 a Review Conference on the Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and requested the Human Rights Council to undertake preparation for the Conference.

Notes from Debriefing Meeting with NGOs with

**Mr Ibrahim Salama, OHCHR Coordinator for the Durban Review Conference,
and members of the Durban Review Conference Secretariat**

Palais des Nations, Room VIII,
9 :15 to 10 :00, 5 June 2009

Summary:

Mr Salama warmly welcomed the NGO representatives to the meeting whose objectives were to receive feedback from NGOs that will assist OHCHR in a 'lessons learned' exercise and to receive ideas and proposals to feed into OHCHR's planning regarding implementation of the Outcome Document. He expressed appreciation and gratitude for the NGOs' contributions to the Durban Review Conference and stressed that the presence of a large number of NGOs at the Conference from various geographic regions was crucial to its success.

Mr Salama noted that a number of NGOs had engaged with, and provided constructive input to, the Outcome Document during the lengthy preparatory processes. However, he was also aware of the disappointment expressed by those NGOs who had not followed closely the preparatory processes. They came to the Durban Review Conference expecting, at this concluding stage of a complex two-year inter-governmental process, to influence the Outcome Document, which was adopted by consensus on the second day of the Conference. He noted that OHCHR is planning follow up with all those who attended the Conference to help ensure that we do not lose the precious contributions of NGOs who are not normally present or represented in Geneva, and whose focus is often community-based. In this respect, he noted that there were lessons learned regarding OHCHR's outreach efforts in linking up with anti-racism constituencies prior to the Durban Review Conference; this is one of the areas in need of strengthening. He called on the support of NGOs and their respective networks in this regard.

Mr. Salama further informed that the High Commissioner had established an internal Follow-up Task Force to undertake a mapping exercise in relation to the Outcome Document, to identify steps to be taken in the remainder of 2009 as well as for the 2010-2011 biennium. The Task Force will submit recommendations for the High Commissioner's consideration by the end of June 2009, with a view to mainstreaming 'racism' issues across the work of OHCHR. Feedback was requested on a proposal to hold theme-based discussions relating to the Outcome Document, and how this might be carried out in a meaningful manner to engage NGOs which are not represented in Geneva. This would assist in translating the Outcome Document into concrete theme-based projects, and aim to engage in a regular manner the broader anti-racism constituency.

Comments and suggestions of the Civil Society representatives were solicited including on the following questions:

- Can we continue to share best practice examples of how to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance?
- Would it be helpful to have some focused brainstorming on specific issues or challenges to seek strategies to address them?
- How can we work together to maximize the benefit of the synergy? How can OHCHR benefit from NGO advice in enhancing our outreach capacity to a broader cross section of NGOs?

Comments and Questions from Civil Society:

I. Matters prior to and during the Review Conference

- It was noted that the **Palestinian NGOs** were frustrated with regard to **their role in the Durban Review Conference**. Although explicitly mentioned as victims in the DDPA, Palestinians were not explicitly mentioned as victims in the Outcome Document.

- It was noted that the **Outcome Document** is a very good achievement and that NGOs are looking forward to implementing it. The language contained with regard to paragraph 5 in respect of “**foreign occupation**” was commended.
- Concern was expressed at the decision taken by the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee, composed of Member States, not to provide space for **Civil Society representatives to take the floor in the General Segment. Had the Secretariat communicated all the information and proposals received from NGOs in full to the Bureau?**
- One representative noted with concern that issues raised in written communications had not been substantively addressed in OHCHR’s responses. One of the communications concerned the process for **distribution of daily badges for NGOs** during the Conference. A substantive response could inform future policy and interaction.
- It was noted that there had been a **climate of “paranoia”** concerning the NGO Forum held before the Conference. However, the concerned NGOs put a lot of effort into negotiating their declaration so that it would be constructive and inform the future actions and plans of the future follow-up.
- It was proposed that **OHCHR meet with the NGOs who worked together to draft the NGO forum declaration.**
- **Appreciation was expressed for OHCHR’s information-sharing policy in order to involve NGOs in the process** and for its continuing efforts to link with the Civil Society in the follow-up process. The E-bulletins were mentioned as a good source of information for NGOs. It was noted, however, that some of the language might have been too technical for NGOs not being based in Geneva and not being acquainted with the Human Rights Council procedures which are, to some extent, similar. There were also concerns that many materials were not available in UN official languages.

II Follow up Issues

- The question was raised as to how the **voices of the victims** can be given a more prominent place in the follow-up process. It was noted that it is commendable that some special procedure mandate holders are already using the Outcome Document as a point of reference in the ongoing Human Rights Council session.
- It was noted that the Civil Society would be interested in the different views and approaches of **other institutions** and about cooperation possibilities between the follow-up mechanisms and those institutions. It was also suggested to share and follow up on the **recommendations made by ILO, UNESCO and CERD** and to liaise with the International Olympic Committee.

- The proposal of **regional conferences** was raised to engage the NGOs from the GRULAC, African and Asian region more pro-actively in the follow-up process.
- A question was raised about the **time frame of the Task Force** and when the NGOs should submit their inputs.
- It was suggested that OHCHR carefully consider **ways of encouraging 2-way communication on follow up with NGOs not based in Geneva.**
- It was suggested that a **Durban + 10 meeting be convened in 2011.**

Responses from Mr Salama and other members of the Secretariat:

I Matters prior to, and during, the Review Conference

There had recently been several very frank and fruitful meetings with NGOs from the Middle East. It would be helpful to explore how future cooperation could link the commendable work done by NGOs on the ground with the Outcome Document. Mr Salama encouraged representatives to look ahead and stressed once again that the work would not end with the Durban Review Conference but rather start with it.

The Secretariat understands that NGO representatives were frustrated that some of the final decisions on the modalities for their engagement with the Durban Review Conference, in particular with regard to NGO participation in the General Segment, were not available at an earlier stage. Every effort had been made to share available information as soon as decisions had been taken by the Bureau. As regards communications received from NGOs nominating potential speakers for the General Segment, these were also received at a late stage but were communicated in their entirety to the Bureau, which finally decided that they did not meet the criteria for participation in the General Segment.

All comments and feedback received from NGOs and other stakeholders will help in the internal lessons learned-exercise and will inform the future plans.

As regards daily badges for NGOs, these were issued on the basis of one badge per NGO for access to the Assembly Hall. This system was chosen as being both fair and transparent, after a variety of options had been considered.

Mr Salama noted the comments concerning the NGO forum and declaration and the perceptions of ‘paranoia’ and also recalled developments around the NGO Forum of the World Conference 2001 which contributed to this.

Mr Salama asked for NGOs’ assistance to communicate to their networks and constituencies that, for the future, it would be advisable to interact with intergovernmental processes at the earliest stages possible. OHCHR’s Civil Society Unit is more than willing to meet with NGOs, individually or in a group.

II Follow up Issues

Mr Salama stressed that now the focus is on the assessment of the implementation of the Outcome Document and the DDPA. How can we best ensure the constant monitoring of implementation? He invited views and further ideas on this issue. He and other members of the Secretariat welcomed the proposals on follow up on regional conferences, institutional recommendations and greater focus on regions, which has already been incorporated into the work, inter alia, of special procedures mandate holders, such as freedom of expression and the special rapporteur on racism's report to the 11th session of the Human Rights Council. NGOs were engaged to be proactive in their engagement with special procedures and treaty bodies in relation to issues emanating from the Outcome Document. In relation to the question of convening a further conference, as proposed, for Durban + 10, in just two years' time, it was understood by the Secretariat that any such proposal would be the prerogative of civil society.

Mr Salama, on behalf of those present from the Secretariat, thanked all for their contributions to the meeting and repeated the invitation to NGOs to provide input as early as possible as the deadline set for the Task Force to report to the High Commissioner is 30 June 2009.

NGOs are kindly requested to send proposals and comments for follow up on the Outcome Documents as soon as possible to: civilsocietyunit@ohchr.org
Kindly mention as the subject line: TASK FORCE INPUT

For inquiries please contact: civilsocietyunit@ohchr.org