

DURBAN

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**High-level Meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the
10th anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and
Programme of Action**



Opening address by

Ms. Navi Pillay

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

New York, 22 September 2011

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellency Mr. Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa,

Your Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly,

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we commemorate the adoption, by consensus, in September 2001 of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. I salute the vast majority of Member States who are showing their support for this important achievement intended to combat racism and make a difference in the lives of so many victims worldwide. The lead up to this commemoration has been undoubtedly challenging, in no small part because the issues are complex and sensitive. No country can claim to be free of racism but we must be resolute in finding the courage to unite and move ahead together.

The DDPA, together with the outcome document of the 2009 Review Conference, provide a comprehensive framework to address the scourge of racism. Crucially, both documents place victims at the center of our efforts against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. They contain a genuinely universal condemnation of racism which acknowledges the injustices of the past and forewarns against both resurgent manifestations and new forms of racism and intolerance.

The DDPA lists a wide range of victims and grounds. Among the former, it speaks of the plight of minorities, such as the Roma, of people of African and of Asian descent, of migrants and indigenous peoples. Among the latter, it includes condemnation of stigma and discrimination on the basis of HIV/AIDS, discrimination based on descent and the multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion faced, in particular, by women.

In sum, the document encompasses victims, sources, causes and forms. It deals with racism in media and new information and communication technologies, trafficking, migration, conflict, poverty and internal displacement. It covers discrimination both in the private and the public sphere. It considers legal assistance and the provision of effective remedies for victims and those affected by racism.

Another important feature of the DDPA is that it not only reminds Governments of their core human rights obligations, but details further actions that States should take in collaboration with parliaments, national institutions, civil society and other partners. They also contemplate strategies of enhanced international cooperation which involve the United Nations and other international mechanisms.

The DDPA and the Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference make clear that the anti-discrimination agenda concerns and belongs to all of us, irrespective of race, colour, descent, ethnic or national origin, affiliation, religion or belief. Their principles are the reliable foundations of our action. And they continue to provide firm guidance in the face of changing circumstances and new challenges.

Excellencies,

Although ten years ago the DDPA presciently provided a comprehensive framework to address contemporary challenges, today we must confront the regrettable gap between the commitments made at that time and the concrete and effective action actually undertaken. Some States have made incremental progress in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, largely through the enactment or amendment of constitutional protections and domestic legislation.

The importance of solid legal regimes to protect rights and provide avenues for remedy and redress is indisputable. Yet, tangible progress cannot be attained without the political will to implement and enforce such laws.

Let us pledge here and now to revitalize our efforts nationally, regionally and globally to combat the scourges of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We can begin by showing leadership here today by underscoring that equality and non-discrimination are fundamental principles of the international community, thereby giving hope to victims. We must all

commit to actions at all levels which address underlying and often structural causes of racism.

The road to a world free from racism is not an easy one. Anti-discrimination work needs careful planning and a long-term focus. It requires commitment and persistence.

In this respect, I wish to highlight the importance of developing the national action plans that the DDPA envisage, with the participation of victims and affected groups. National action plans are proving an important tool to address racism at the domestic level. My Office has been providing training and technical assistance in this area, and we stand ready to assist more States in this endeavour. We will also continue to serve as a forum for dialogue, exchange and research on anti-discrimination issues, for we believe that informed credible exchange and dialogue amongst States, United Nations experts, academics, parliaments, civil society and other partners on these issues can create greater understanding and build trust.

As mandated by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, OHCHR will continue to support key mechanisms such as the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, the Inter-governmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Finally, we are determined to continue enhancing anti-discrimination efforts across the United Nations. It will be important to ally with our sister agencies to improve our system-wide coordination on anti-discrimination issues affecting women, children, indigenous peoples, migrants, trafficked persons, people living with HIV/AIDS and others.

Excellencies,

I wish to conclude by noting that few people in the world today would openly deny that human beings are born with equal rights, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims. And we all agree that far too many people are still victimized because they belong to a particular group -- whether national, ethnic, or religious, or defined by gender or by descent. The DDPA - through the perspective of victims - provides a comprehensive framework to translate this sentiment and this recognition to action.

Looking ahead, there is much more work to be done to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. I urge everyone to summon the political will to unite on this issue of central importance in the lives of countless victims. So far we have done too little, too slowly. We have allowed the global response to racism to be clouded by politics. We must do better. The victims of racism demand and expect this of us.

Thank you.

