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Israel to Boycott UN Conference on Racism

The conference will be a follow-up to a 2001 summit in Durban, South Africa, on the same topics. Both Israel and the United States walked out of the 2001 conference in protest over draft texts branding Israel as a racist and apartheid state. The offending language was later dropped.

Reuters news reported that in August officials from 21 African countries held talks ahead of the Geneva conference and adopted a text recommending that the conference discuss, among other issues, "the plight of the Palestinian people under foreign occupations."



"Israel will not participate and will not legitimise the [Durban] Review Conference, which will be used as a platform for anti-Israel and anti-Semitic activity," Livni told a conference of North American Jewish leaders visiting Jerusalem.

Livni said there was no indication that things would go better at the Geneva gathering than they had in Durban. She was quoted by AFP, the French Press Agency, as saying: "Despite our efforts and those of friendly countries, for whose position we are grateful, the conference appears to be heading once again towards becoming an anti-Israeli tribunal, which has nothing to do with fighting racism."

The Israeli minister cited a paper the Asian Group submitted to the conference's preparatory committee, which she said "reproduces, almost word by word, the rhetoric of the Tehran Planning Meeting in 2001, a meeting which led to the Durban 1 farce."

"Once again extremist Arab and Muslim states wish to control the content of the conference and derail it from its original mission," said Livni.

The office of UN human rights commissioner Navi Pillay expressed regrets with Israel's decision.

"Given the critical importance of the issues under discussion at the conference, broad participation is essential," said UN spokeswoman Marie Okabe in New York, speaking for the Geneva-based office. "These ... are issues which affect all countries and millions of individuals around the world on a daily basis."

The New American magazine's print edition for October 8, 2001, published a report on the Durban conference entitled "The UN Conference on Racism," by its Senior Editor William F. Jasper. In that report, Jasper noted: "Weeks before the conference started, militant Arab, Muslim, African, and African-American delegates and NGOs let it be known that that they would be using the meeting to advance their radical agendas on two contentious and polarizing issues: the Israeli Palestinian conflict and reparations for slavery. Recognizing this fact, the United States did not send a high-level delegation."

Jasper wrote: "The United States and Israel abandoned the conference mid-week and others threatened to walk out as well, due to the intolerance of the official delegations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dominating the event."



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