



**UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN
IRELAND**

STATEMENT BY

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AT THE DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE

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Statement to the Durban Review Conference by the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Mr Peter Gooderham

Britain is a multiracial, multi-faith society. A home to people from all parts of the world, and of all religions. We have some of the toughest and most progressive equality and anti-discrimination laws in the world.

The United Kingdom is firmly committed to the elimination of all forms of racism and intolerance. We have developed policies and legislation to address discrimination, intolerance and violence. Since 2001 we have continued – and stepped up – our efforts.

My Government engaged in this conference because we share its principle objective of furthering the global fight against racism, and to review progress in this effort since 2001. But conferences like these merely set benchmarks. It is the follow-up that is important. My Government calls on all members of the United Nations to now focus on implementation of the commitments we have so painstakingly negotiated.

Preparations for this conference have been, at times, difficult, but all delegations have worked hard to seek common ground. This is the least that victims of racism around the world should expect. I thank all delegations for their willingness to compromise, which has enabled us to find agreement on a concluding document to this conference.

In this hall on Monday, we witnessed first hand the type of behaviour that marred the Durban World Conference Against Racism in 2001. I commend the leadership shown by the UN Secretary General and High Commissioner for Human Rights in condemning the Iranian President's statement. I agree with the Secretary General that the Iranian President's words were "the opposite of what this conference seeks to achieve."

My Government condemns in the strongest possible terms President Ahmedinejad's statement, which we viewed as unacceptable for a United Nations anti-racism forum. My delegation left the hall not only in protest, but in solidarity with those targeted by his hateful, anti-Semitic words.

In that same spirit of solidarity, my Government is determined to face down the forces of intolerance. That is why we remain at this conference and are determined to work with partners from around the world to find solutions to the problems faced by victims of all forms of racism and discrimination today.

Mr Chairman

In 2005, we launched our governmental race equality and community cohesion strategy. This met the commitment we made at Durban to produce national action plans to tackle racism and discrimination. It explained our commitment to address inequality for different ethnic groups across the most important aspects of life and included themes

identified at Durban, including education, employment, health, housing and the criminal justice system.

My Government has published three progress reports on our strategy, most recently in February this year. This shows encouraging signs of progress, but also that we have much to do. We have therefore launched a public discussion on our future approach to tackling race inequalities, publishing a discussion document and engaging communities across the country.

We have further strengthened our laws against discrimination and hate crime since the 2001 World Conference Against Racism.

Much attention in this conference has been devoted to dealing with incitement to racial and religious hatred. My Government understands and respects that hateful speech and actions can cause distress and hurt, especially to people with strongly held beliefs.

In late 2001, we extended our laws on racially aggravated violence to include religiously aggravated offences, with higher penalties for such hate crimes. We increased penalties for incitement to racial hatred from 2 to 7 years imprisonment. In 2006, we introduced a new offence of incitement to religious hatred.

We strengthened legislation on racial discrimination by bringing the EU Race Directive into domestic law. We outlawed discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and sexual orientation. We are progressively outlawing age discrimination. My Government will soon introduce a new Equality Bill, further strengthening and simplifying anti-discrimination legislation.

The British Government endeavours to build understanding between our diverse communities. We are implementing the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Integration and Cohesion, as part of our commitment to delivering cohesive and integrated communities. Last year we launched an interfaith framework, which is stimulating dialogue and helping build understanding among people of different faiths, or no faith at all.

2007 marked the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade by the UK parliament. That was an opportunity for all of us in the UK to reflect on the legacy of that abhorrent trade; to honour the memory of its many millions of victims; and to recognize the efforts of all those who struggled for its abolition including enslaved Africans, states and individual citizens.

Mr Chairman,

In closing, I would like to state my Government's clear desire that this conference should be seen as a turning point in our efforts to confront all forms of intolerance around the world.

Meeting British-based NGOs last night, I was given the very clear message that they expected more from us, both as Government and as the international community. It is important to maintain our dialogue with civil society in continuing our work to fight racism. That was a sobering message. The Durban review process has been dominated by certain issues to the detriment of others. This politicisation has to end if the United Nations is to be seen as a force in fighting racism, giving all victims the attention and respect they deserve and require.

The fight against racism is too important a cause to be hijacked by those who seek to promote hatred. We should not leave the stage only to those, like President Ahmedinejad, would take global efforts against racism backwards.

Mr Chairman, the United Kingdom's record is far from perfect. We have much to do, and we recognize that. But we do our utmost to fulfil our obligations to every British citizen. I hope in our contribution to this review conference, we have shown that.