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Statement by

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“Elimination of racism and racial discrimination”

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I would like to take this opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to thank you again for your able guidance of this Committee's deliberations.

Mr. Chairman,

Racism and xenophobia are as old as recorded history. While we cannot erase the wrongs of the past, we can do everything within our power to end blind hatred directed against any person or group. Israel is committed to this principle, and it has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, as many other countries have. But this is not enough.

In spite of the Convention's near-universal ratification, my delegation notes with alarm the sharp rise in racist and discriminatory acts around the world, a trend that the Special Rapporteur called "unprecedented" in his report earlier this year. For example, recent data put the incidence of anti-Semitic attacks in 2007 at nearly seven percent above the year before. Jews and others are anxious and have good reason to be. Racism and xenophobia are once again being woven into politics and national agendas and are creeping into mainstream speech. When did it become acceptable again, even fashionable, to hate "the other"?

Mr. Chairman,

Veiled anti-Semitism, often in the guise of anti-Zionism, must be unmasked. Such invective – such racism – as we have heard from the leaders of some nations must never be mistaken for ordinary political discourse. With absolute disregard for the Charter of the United Nations, the president of Iran repeatedly calls for the destruction of Israel, and two months ago, this leader stood before the General Assembly uttering despicable characterizations that should have brought universal condemnation. Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, many States did not condemn his vile platform of hatred because, once again, alliances trumped ideals. All nations with a genuine desire to promote peace should guard against the co-opting of legitimate language and ideas by racist demagogues.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wholeheartedly supports the assertion contained in the Special Rapporteur's latest report to the Human Rights Council on defamation of religions that, in spite of the mandate given the Special Rapporteur, bigotry toward *all* religions must be given equal attention. Any attempt to create a hierarchy of aggrieved groups runs absolutely contrary to the spirit of the mandate.

Elsewhere under the United Nations umbrella, however, my delegation must voice its concern about the preparations leading up to the Durban Review Conference, in which only one State, Israel, is mentioned from among nearly 200 Member States. Moreover, the "Draft Outcome Document" for Durban II, compiled from inputs of the regional groups, portrays Israel as the enemy of humanity, using language which reproduces, almost word-for-word, the rhetoric of the Tehran planning meeting in 2001, a meeting

which led to the Durban I farce. These and other indications give us reason to believe that the upcoming Conference will be, once again, a venue for the obsessive vilification of Israel and the Jewish People. In deviating from its stated purpose of shaping positive and innovative solutions to contemporary racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, the Conference will miss a rare opportunity for States to jointly address the real work that needs to be done. Moreover, it risks becoming, itself, a platform for racial incitement targeting one nation. Words may quickly turn into action.

Mr. Chairman,

In a few days, Jews will commemorate the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht, that infamous night when nascent anti-Semitism exploded into the maelstrom that would consume much of world Jewry. It also started with words. The Kristallnacht commemoration, however, is also an occasion to look forward, because the greatest value of the past lies in how it can help guide us in the future. In response to this urgent need, there have been several United Nations resolutions concerning the Holocaust. The first, on Holocaust Remembrance, adopted three years ago, stands as a testament to the unique scale of these events. Another resolution, adopted by UNESCO last year, concerns Holocaust education. Through education, all people can learn of the terrible consequences of prejudice, fear and hatred. In an increasing number of outreach programmes on the Holocaust, young people, especially, can learn to question indoctrination into the ways of hatred. We are heartened by the emphasis given to indoctrination and incitement in the Special Rapporteur's recent reports. Indoctrination molds the racist, and incitement is the genesis of racist acts.

Political leaders, too, have an important role to play in reinforcing these lessons. Their public commitment to combating all forms of prejudice, including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Christianophobia, can set an example for the general population. Promoting intercultural dialogue is one of the tools they can use to ease tensions between communities.

Mr. Chairman,

People and nations have so far shown only halting willingness to learn from the past. History, however, is a work-in-progress, and history will record if and when we were finally ready to learn these lessons.

This should be a time for individual and national reflection regarding our words and actions. What message should we be sending to our capitals, our colleagues and our families? Israel stands ready to engage in meaningful dialogue with the goal of lasting peace and co-existence. To do this, all parties must let the accumulated corrosive layers of prejudice slip away and cease poisoning the minds of the next generation. The capacity of the human spirit to overcome the darker impulses is great, and Israel calls on States to rededicate themselves to ensuring that reason will prevail.

Thank you.