

UNITED to Combat Racism
UN WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION,
XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE
NGO Forum 28/8-1/9 2001 and
World Conference 31/8-7/9 2001 in Durban (ZA)

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD'S EYES ON DURBAN

The United Nations World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) together with its preceding NGO Forum has been held in Durban in September 2001. It became one of the most vigorously debated international meetings in recent years, drawing the world's attention to the persistence and complexity of contemporary forms of racism.

The terrorist attacks in the USA and their aftermath soon overshadowed the Durban event in the eyes of world-wide public opinion, but it is certain that the legacy of Durban will remain an important reference point in future international and national discussions on racism and related intolerance. Indeed, some observers have argued that manifestations of the very tensions and serious global problems that were at the root of the tragic events of 11 September 2001 had been observable in Durban during the conference itself. That makes it even more important to look back at the WCAR and to discuss its impact.

Apart from some important elements of consensus, both the WCAR and the NGO Forum had its own significant share of controversy and divisions, which resulted in the dissatisfaction of many of the participating parties. There were many who had been sceptical almost from the very beginning of the preparatory process.

UNITED for Intercultural Action invested a lot of effort and energy into the complex preparations for Durban. As the biggest anti-racist network active throughout Europe UNITED was able to play an important role in connecting grass roots organisations to events on the world level. Although some of the network organisations may not feel the UN conference had a direct relevance to their work, and others may have been in disagreement with some of the WCAR conclusions, it was important to keep them informed about developments both before and during the Durban meeting so they could form their own opinions on the basis of first-hand knowledge.

UNITED and the Magenta Foundation formed together a vast electronic information disseminator called I CARE. From its start in the fall of 1999 I CARE has streamlined the preparatory process for the WCAR and its (regional) preparatory conferences and committees. I CARE has created several interactive information in/outlets like the I CARE website (www.icare.to) and the un-discussion mailing list, on which 700-plus organisations and individuals took part in the preparatory process through discussions. One of the direct outcomes of the discourse on this mailing list was the Vienna Preparatory Conference for Africans and African Descendants. Right now the un-discussion list continues to be used as the main tool for sharing information and ideas on regional follow-up of Durban. Furthermore, from the Strasbourg European Preparatory Conference onwards, I CARE has facilitated the forming of the Regional Co-ordinating Committees and the International Steering Committee, providing them with their own mailing lists. During the Preparatory Committees (Prep Com) II and III in Geneva I CARE created web pages for the caucuses. 17 different caucuses used this opportunity to publish press statements, commentaries about specific paragraphs in the governmental documents, etc. The caucus pages are still in use today. During Prep Com III I CARE has assisted in founding and electronically facilitating a Linkage Caucus. The media coverage of the Durban events was often sensationalist, focusing on the most heated points of controversy and ignoring the vast majority of important topics under debate. On the other hand, in some cases the arguments went far beyond legitimate differences of opinion and took forms that should not have been seen at any anti-racist meeting (or, indeed, any other gathering).

UNITED and Magenta emphatically denounce any intolerant, racist and discriminatory texts and slogans used inside and outside the NGO Forum. It is also highly lamentable that some sections of the otherwise very useful NGO Forum final documents were adopted in breach of democratic procedures. They contain language that was not approved by a large number of the participants. The UNITED representative on the International Steering Committee of the NGO Forum protested against such occurrences and insisted on the fundamental values of democracy and transparency in the process.

While the final documents of such conferences are important, the meeting itself and the process leading up to it are of no lesser value. Anti-racist non-governmental organisations from around the world have had a chance to come together. It was estimated that some 6000-8000 people from around the globe came to South Africa to participate in the WCAR and its accompanying events! The resulting feeling of belonging to a global movement against racism is of immeasurable value. Unfortunately this feeling could not be shared by all, as many felt utterly disappointed and alone as a result of the above mentioned intolerance.

It is important to look both at the achievements and the failures of Durban, bearing in mind that one side should not be allowed to overshadow the other in the assessment and in the construction of future-oriented follow-up strategies.

2. BASIC BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROCESS

At its 52nd session, the UN General Assembly agreed "to convene a world conference on racism and racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance" to be held no later than the year 2001. The proposal for such a conference had been put forward by the UN Commission on Human Rights.

It was decided the World Conference would be held under the title "UNITED AGAINST RACISM". It was envisaged as a global meeting in the series which included the UN World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), and the UN World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).

The UN General Assembly determined the objectives of the Conference as:

- reviewing progress made against racial discrimination, to re-appraise obstacles to further progress and to devise ways to overcome them;
- considering how to ensure better application of existing standards to combat racial discrimination
- increasing awareness about racism and its consequences;
- making recommendations with regard to new national, regional and international measures that could be adopted to fight racism.
- The General Assembly also proclaimed 2001 the Year of Mobilisation against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

2.1. PREPARATORY PROCESS

Prior to the World Conference, regional meetings had been held to prepare for it. The European Conference on racism in the framework of preparations to the World Conference was organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg under the title "All Different, All Equal: From Principle to Practice". It took place from 11th till 13th October 2000 and it was preceded by an NGO Forum on 10-11 October. The Forum took the title "End Racism Now!"

The European Conference resulted in General Conclusions forwarded to the Preparatory Committee of the World Conference. At the conclusion of the European Conference, ministers of the Council of Europe member states adopted a Political Declaration. The NGO Forum, too, produced a wide-ranging Report, which was presented to the Preparatory Committee as well as to civil society and public opinion in general.

The structure of the NGO contribution in Durban, and especially the NGO Forum, had been prepared by a 20-member International Steering Committee elected by NGOs themselves on a geographical basis. The European organisations were represented by Miroslav Prokes for UNITED, Vera Egenberger for ENAR and Delia Grigore for the Roma. The European representation in the ISC was elected by, and accountable to, the European Co-ordinating Committee (ECC) which had 12 members. The ECC had been, in turn, elected by all interested European NGOs, who had the possibility to vote by e-mail, fax or mail (109 valid votes were sent to the UN office in Geneva). Six seats were reserved for Western European NGOs and six for Central and Eastern European ones. The following organisations were represented in the ECC:

Western Europe

National Black Youth Forum (GB)
MIRA (N)
ENAR (B)
European Women's Lobby (B)
TIYE International (NL)
Minorities of Europe (GB)

Central and Eastern Europe

Antifascist Youth Action (RUS)
European Roma Rights Centre (H)
UNITED Prague (CZ)
Roma Centre for Public Policies "Aven Amentza" (RO)
HR Centre "Memorial" (RUS)
Youth Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (MD)

The ISC co-operated with SANGOCO (South African NGO Coalition) and the UN NGO Liaison Office, which were also responsible for various aspects of the NGO participation. Although it is important in any such process to separate the technical and political preparation, this was not the case in the WCAR process. The informational and practical advantage of the SANGOCO secretariat has often been seen to influence the political proceedings of the NGO Forum disproportionately.

2.2. THEMATIC COMMISSIONS AND WORKSHOPS

The NGO Forum consisted of plenary sessions and numerous workshops initiated by various NGOs themselves. A number of 'thematic commissions' were approved by the International Steering Committee as part of the NGO Forum programme.

They dealt with the following issues selected by the ISC:

African descendants, Antisemitism, Colonialism, Dalit, Disability, Education, Ethnic cleansing/conflict/genocide, Foreign occupation, Gender, Globalisation/environmental racism, Hate crimes, Health HIV/AIDS, Indigenous peoples, Information/media, Migration/refugees, National/ethnic minorities, Palestine, Religious intolerance, Reparation/compensation, Roma/Travellers, Sexual orientation, Slavery, Trafficking, Youth and children.

In addition there were hundreds of workshops initiated and conducted by interested groups, on individual NGO initiative. The ISC took the unprecedented decision to give up trying to consolidate the wishes of all NGOs in the antiracist community, but to let all voices of victims be heard. They should have the right to describe their situation and nobody should have the right to interfere in the language or content of their 'paragraphs'.

Caucuses (or NGO coalitions) were intended to function as fora for persons/groups that share common interests and take positions. The caucuses were formed on the geographical basis (e.g. the European Caucus) or on the basis of a special topic (e.g. Migration). In the process the caucuses, some of them formed at last minute on the spot, became chief actors of the often unhappy decision-making at the NGO Forum, mainly with regard to the voting procedure at the adoption of Forum documents.

When consensus on a number of issues (most notably Palestine) appeared impossible, voting was used at the final plenary with each caucus having one vote to indicate approval or objection to a section of the text. This procedure drew many criticisms because of its lack of clarity and especially because the rules seemed to be changed as the process went on. As a result many organisations have felt that the documents, which were adopted late at night when many participants had already left the Forum, could not be treated as a genuine attempt to reach a common understanding. In particular, the chapter on the Palestinian problem has been criticised for its inappropriate language and for the disproportionate focus of the document on one of many ethnic-political conflicts in the contemporary world, while other serious cases of mass human rights abuses, e.g. the war in Chechnya, were barely mentioned.

The fact that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, known as an outspoken enthusiast of NGO participation in the WCAR, took the decision not to recommend the NGO Forum documents to the governmental conference because of their "inappropriate language", signifies the decrease of weight attached to the documents conceived without due consideration for a democratic consensus.

The lack of procedural clarity was a major handicap of the Durban NGO Forum. On the other hand, it was rather unrealistic to expect a timely and orderly structure of proceedings in a meeting of such enormous scale.

There was also a youth summit, which gathered several hundred representatives of youth organisations from many countries. It preceded the NGO Forum itself. Among others, its participants decided to continue co-operation in the structure of an International Youth Network Against Racism (groups.yahoo.com/group/iynar).

3. ISSUES

It is impossible to summarise all the important discussions and subjects raised at the WCAR, the NGO Forum, and throughout the preparatory process, including the regional preparatory meetings, in this short report. The selection of issues here is incomplete and arbitrary out of necessity. One of the strengths of the WCAR was its broad approach to the question of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

3.1. SLAVERY AND REPARATIONS

Arguably, the official recognition of slavery and slave trade as a crime against humanity has been the single most positive outcome of this United Nations conference. It is welcomed by anti-racists from all over the world as an important symbolic step in their struggle. It was achieved after prolonged and hectic negotiations on the governmental level. NGOs made their opinion on this

issue strongly heard, too, which had its impact on the debates and their successful conclusion.

We affirm that the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the enslavement of Africans and African Descendants was a crime against humanity and a unique tragedy in the history of humanity, and that its roots and bases were economic, institutional, systemic and transnational in dimension.

NGO Forum Declaration, point 64

We acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity not only because of their abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of their magnitude, organised nature and especially their negation of the essence of the victims and further acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade are crimes against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade and are among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and peoples of African descent, Asians and peoples of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of these acts and continue to be victims of their consequences.

Governmental Conference Declaration (unedited version), point 13

The corresponding issue of reparations was also a subject of much discussion both at the WCAR and at the NGO Forum as well as in the media. A vast majority of NGOs supported demands for various forms of reparations for countries which still suffer from the colonial legacy and descendants of the victims of slave trade and colonialism. The US civil rights leader Rev. Jessie Jackson was among the most prominent campaigners for reparations actively present in Durban. The case for reparations was supported by a limited number of governmental delegations, almost exclusively from the Third World but it is expected to remain on the international agenda, where it was put firmly in Durban.

Slave-holder nations, colonizers and occupying countries have unjustly enriched themselves at the expense of those people that they enslaved and colonized and whose land they have occupied. As these nations largely owe their political, economic and social domination to the exploitation of Africa, Africans and Africans in the Diaspora they should recognize their obligation to provide these victims just and equitable reparations.

NGO Forum Declaration, point 71

3.2. PALESTINE

Judging from some media reports one might think the WCAR and the NGO Forum were essentially devoted to the question of Palestine. They were not. In fact, the discussion of the Arab-Israeli conflict was merely one of many dozens of topics in Durban. Surely there are serious elements of xenophobia on both sides of the conflict and as such it was legitimate to deal with it on this occasion. However, the very visible lack of sensitivity to the other's feelings led the issue to become the most divisive and thus damaging not just for the governmental conference, but also to the NGO Forum. The fact that many members of Jewish organisations reported they had felt intimidated by the kind of crude anti-Israeli rhetoric, and even outspoken antisemitism displayed at the Forum, raises questions about solidarity and the willingness to achieve consensus which should have been the core features of a meeting of anti-racist NGOs. A report on some of the incidents can be found on I CARE (WCAR, the morning after: www.icare.to/wcar).

The governmental delegations prolonged their deliberations for a day and they were eventually able to find a compromise in the wording of the final declaration of the WCAR. This came after

days of controversy, which resulted in the walkout of the Israeli and US delegations and threatened the collapse of the conference.

Unfortunately, one could not witness an attempt to find a parallel compromise at the NGO Forum. In result many of the participating organisations signed several open letters distancing themselves from the antisemitic incidents and the NGO Declaration and Plan of Action which used descriptions such as "apartheid" and "genocide" to criticise the whole state entity of Israel. The text goes beyond and against the UN resolutions that have been made in the matter. With hindsight it seems that another failure of the Durban event was the lack of an appropriately organised and publicised initiative of a mixed group of people advocating peace and dialogue in Israel/Palestine. On the other hand, it is clear the roots of the nasty arguments had not been to be found in South Africa but in the Middle East, and what happened in Durban was simply a reflection of the escalating conflict situation there. In Durban the same mistake was often made that confronts Jewish people and organisations everywhere: all Jews were held responsible for what is happening in Israel/Palestine.

We are concerned about the plight of the Palestinian people under foreign occupation. We recognize the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent state and its recognizes the right to security for all States in the region, including Israel, and call upon all States to support the peace process and bring it to an early conclusion;

Governmental Conference Declaration (unedited version), point 61

Numerous other cases of foreign occupation and a nation's struggle for self-determination received only a small fraction of attention paid to Palestine. They included Tibet, Chechnya, Kurdistan, Western Sahara, and many others.

Acknowledging that a foreign occupation which imposes an alien domination and subjugation with the denial of territorial integrity amounts to colonialism (according to the principles of the 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples' of the UN General Assembly 1960) and denies the fundamental rights of self determination, independence and freedom of the people under occupation. It also creates an environment in which the occupied people are exposed to a wide range of systematic and gross violations of human rights and freedom. We extend our solidarity to the struggles for self determination for people of Palestine, West Sumatra, Aceh-Sumatra, Bougainville, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, North Cyprus, and other states and indigenous communities including the Kurdish people, the indigenous people in the north east of India and in the north east of Sri Lanka, in Tibet, Kashmir, Bhutan, Mindanao and the non independent countries of the Caribbean, like Puerto Rico and recognize the situation of other people living under foreign occupation in different parts of the world.

NGO Forum Declaration, point 97

3.3. DALIT - THE 'UNTOUCHABLES'

A great deal of success at Durban was achieved by the movement for the emancipation of Dalits: the 'untouchables', victims of the caste system. Not only were they able to counter the image of perfect national unity and harmony put forward by the Indian government, but also to spread the knowledge, hitherto alien to most delegates, of their plight as millions of victims of discrimination based on work and descent which is akin to racism. Victims' testimonies as well as music, dance, and theatre presented by Dalits made a lasting impression on thousands of the participants. As one observer noted, from now on it is going to be difficult if not impossible to hold international discussions on racism and discrimination without mentioning the question of Dalits among other topics.

Caste discrimination and 'untouchability' practised against generations of Dalits for centuries together amounts to systemic 'generational and cultural Daliticide', which is the mass-scale destruction of their individual and collective identity, dignity and self-respect for generations through cultural methods and practices.

NGO Forum Declaration, point 87

3.4. ROMA/SINTI/TRAVELLERS

Another group, which has successfully promoted their cause, were the Roma who arrived in Durban mostly from Eastern and Central Europe. The demand for the recognition of the Roma as a non-territorial nation was communicated to numerous participants who had not been aware of the discrimination and violence the Roma people frequently suffer in many European countries.

Acknowledging the transnational character of the Roma identity and its common roots from India, we strongly support the right of Roma to be recognized by the UN, by the regional inter-governmental bodies and organizations, by States and by the whole world, as a non-territorial nation.

NGO Forum Declaration, point 177

[The WCAR] Encourages States, to adopt appropriate and concrete policies and measures, to develop implementation mechanisms, where these do not already exist, and to exchange experiences, in cooperation with representatives of the Roma/Sinti/ Travellers, in order to eradicate discrimination against them, enable them to achieve equality and ensure their full enjoyment of all their human rights, as recommended in the case of the Roma by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its General Recommendation XXVII, so that their needs are met

Governmental Conference Programme of Action (unedited version), point 40

3.5. MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

The important topic of migration in the context of racist and xenophobic practises and policies, as reflected by the fatal realities of "Fortress Europe", was also an important part of Durban discussions. Despite the natural reluctance of numerous governments to admit the flaws of their border control policies, the necessity for a more civilised and humane migration framework became increasingly evident before and during the meeting in Durban.

[We are] gravely concerned about the failure of states to protect the rights of all those living within their borders especially in the face of increasing xenophobic acts against migrants, migrant workers and members of their family, refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked, stateless and internally displaced persons and in particular concerned about oppressive and restrictive immigration policies, the criminalization, stigmatisation, targeting and victimisation of these groups.

NGO Forum Declaration, point 56

We recognize that interregional and intraregional migration has increased as a result of globalization, in particular from the South to the North, and stress that policies towards migration should not be based on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance;

Governmental Conference Declaration (unedited version), point 12

3.6. GLOBALISATION

It is very normal to expect a UN conference to look at issues from a generalised global perspective as well, especially in the view of the increasing interdependence on the level of the economy and culture in today's world. The impact of globalisation on racism, xenophobia and structural inequalities was discussed in many fora in Durban.

Globalisation including structural adjustment policies, privatisation, trade liberalisation and unequal terms of trade create new and exacerbate already existing conditions of exclusion of all individuals and communities, particularly women, who are the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

NGO Forum Declaration, point 56

We note that the process of globalization constitutes a powerful and dynamic force which should be harnessed/utilized for the benefit, development and prosperity of all countries, without exclusion. We recognize that developing countries face special difficulties in responding to this central challenge. While globalization offers great opportunities, at present its benefits are very unevenly shared, while its costs are unevenly distributed.

Governmental Conference Declaration (unedited version), point 11

3.7. NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

On a more concrete level, the idea of national action plans was introduced. It is hoped that national governments will take it upon themselves to develop practical sets of policies to implement the conclusions of the WCAR in dialogue with relevant NGOs. Although no binding commitments or obligations were made in this field, however, the concept of national action plans is probably one of the most important concrete achievements of Durban.

[The WCAR] recognizes that combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is a primary responsibility of States. It therefore encourages States to develop or elaborate national action plans to promote diversity, equality, equity, social justice, equality of opportunity and the participation of all. Through, among other things, affirmative or positive actions and strategies, these plans should aim at creating conditions for all to participate effectively in decision-making and realize civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights in all spheres of life on the basis of non-discrimination. The World Conference encourages States, in developing and elaborating such action plans, to establish, or reinforce, dialogue with non-governmental organizations in order to involve them more closely in designing, implementing and evaluating policies and programmes;

Governmental Conference Programme of Action (unedited version), point 99

[We] call upon the UN to organize a follow-up conference in 2005 in order to evaluate the progress made by States, governments and civil society in the fight against racism and to put in place mechanisms to monitor implementation at an international level of all regional and national action plans.

NGO Forum Programme of Action, point 22

4. UNITED AND I CARE: THEIR ROLE IN PROVIDING INFORMATION

UNITED for Intercultural Action informed hundreds of network organisations about the WCAR preparatory process through meetings (most notably "Ready ! Steady! Go! European Youth Preparation to the UN World Conference Against Racism" in Strasbourg, May 2000), as well as specially prepared leaflets and posters. It used more innovative forms of communication on a large scale, too, namely the Internet.

In the context of the WCAR preparatory process UNITED for Intercultural Action and Magenta Foundation created a joint project under the title Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe (I CARE). It was intended as a tool for European anti-racist NGOs for their own preparation and participation in the various stages of the preparatory process. It has given an electronic voice to dozens of anti-racist initiatives and non-governmental organisations throughout the continent.

UNITED took part in the NGO Resource Group and the Technical Working Group, two entities cooperating with the Council of Europe in preparing both the governmental European Conference Against Racism and the preceding NGO Forum. Through this presence it was possible to provide non-governmental organisations with first hand and timely information.

The comprehensive I CARE website was launched in October 1999. It provided regular information on issues of racism and discrimination through its news service updated twice a week.

In May 2000 the I CARE team participated in the meeting "Ready ! Steady! Go! European Youth Preparation to the UN World Conference Against Racism" in Strasbourg (organised by UNITED). Through its Internet facilities, I CARE made it possible for activists from around Europe and beyond to follow and participate in the programme of the meeting.

In July 2000 I CARE resources were used in the proceedings of the International Youth Forum Against Racism taking place in Hannover.

From January till October 2000 I CARE ran e-mail discussion lists in preparation for the European Conference Against Racism in Strasbourg. This activity was later continued before, during and after the WCAR itself.

In October 2000 I CARE reported live to the outside world from the European Conference, giving a chance to NGOs and individuals not present in Strasbourg to voice their concerns and to discuss with government officials and other NGOs a.o. through daily chat sessions: the InterConference. After the European Conference a co-ordinating body was set up, in which UNITED took part. In close cooperation with the Magenta Foundation, the information from this body was made public in preparation for the WCAR. I CARE facilitated the work of the coordinating NGOs by providing them with e-mail discussion lists.

In May and August 2001 I CARE reported on Internet on the proceedings of the World Conference Preparatory Committees (Prep Com) which negotiated the shape of the future WCAR documents in Geneva.

Various versions of drafts and other important documents relevant to the WCAR were made public through the I CARE website.

Furthermore I CARE runs and moderates the un-discussion list, an e-mail discussion list which bring together hundreds of non-governmental activists. The list functioned before, during and after the Durban conference and it served as an important forum for discussion for NGOs. It informed non-governmental organisations about the forthcoming UN World Conference and the NGO Forum and enabled them to exchange views and opinions on their participation in it. It is interesting to note that most of the themes that dominated the WCAR had already been pre-discussed on the un-discussion list. The un-discussion list has also been an important forum for the evaluation of the WCAR and the NGO Forum.

Finally, I CARE reported daily from the WCAR in Durban, thus giving a chance to follow the proceedings of the NGO Forum, the UN conference and some of the accompanying events, to numerous interested groups and individuals who could not be on the spot. In its daily reports, I CARE used text, photographs and video-interviews. The standard of reporting on the I CARE website was high. All throughout the preparatory process I CARE gave a voice to the voiceless. When certain groups could not speak, for whatever reason, they were given space on I CARE. I CARE remained an unbiased voice reflecting the diversity of the anti-racist movement as a whole. The I CARE team was truly multinational consisting of anti-racist activists from across Europe and with a diverse NGO-background. They provided daily reports and articles in English, French and Spanish, which were consulted by more than 10.000 people until now.

The I CARE reports (which can still be found on www.icare.to) were also published by other web sites and news services such as:

Human Rights Internet - www.hri.ca

AntiRacismNet - www.igc.org/igc/gateway/arn/archive/arch090101.html

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies - www.jointcenter.org/durban/day1.html

More than 400 web sites have made a direct link to the I CARE site. Since the start of the preparatory process more than 50.000 people used the I CARE web site as a reference and information source. I CARE received praise by mail and directly during the process, coining I CARE a.o. 'THE antiracism NGO information disseminator' and the 'best Human Rights portal on the web'. Even now, while the feelings about the WCAR are mixed, all parties agree on the immense value that I CARE has brought to the process.

More information on the preparatory process can also be found in the following bi-lingual (GB/F) reports that are still available:

- Comments from Cyberspace
- InterConference Report

5. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

There are many questions that remain unresolved at the time of writing this report: What form will the WCAR follow-up take? Will there be another UN conference in 5 years to review progress made since Durban? What will be the role of NGOs in the follow-up? Will there be a new structure overseeing NGO participation, replacing the ISC and SANGOCO-secretariat?

History was weighting heavy on our shoulders during those days - noted one participant of the un-discussion list looking back to the Durban conference. It is certain the Durban WCAR brought much more positive results than the previous two UN conferences on racism. These achievements remain important while we should also keep in mind the negative aspects, as discussed above.

The preparatory process, too, brought some good results, e.g. the European Conference and its documents. Now it is up to governments but also to anti-racist organisations to make sure the momentum is not lost. It is perhaps even more important to constantly remind ourselves about the basics of non-discrimination in the context of the current international situation. It will be important to address the divisions which erupted in Durban and which have created a certain rift within the antiracism community.

UNITED and Magenta see their role in the follow-up mainly in continuing the provision of valuable information, so that the antiracism community can find a way forward. All feed-back and comments on the WCAR process, on the role of I CARE, UNITED and Magenta are welcomed. The discussion continues on the un-discussion@icare.to mailing list. Taking part is easy: just send an email to 'un-discussion' with the request to be subscribed!

The following are some quotes from the un-discussion list concerning the follow-up of the WCAR:

Why is it that I don't feel that WCAR was a failure? (...) Sure, there were things I was frustrated with, but I get frustrated with my husband and children, too. I don't give up on them, though. We can't give up on this beginning either.

Cheryl Fischer, Outback, USA

I disagree that there is one authentic story of Durban or that there is one lesson that if we all learn it things will necessarily be better. I have been surprised to return to Alberta and have people say that they "enjoyed" Durban. I thought, go figure. But then, I did not attend many of the 350 workshops, or all of the plenaries, commissions, caucuses. My networking opportunities were not satisfactory although I came away with a few enduring contacts (and some personal losses). My experience was more of a potpourri and I am still trying to digest it all. (...) In fact, in all honesty, with a few unacceptable and contradictory positions in the NGO document, there was some broad consensus. We need to continue to name the specific problems and, at the same time, to give voice to the consensus and successes.

Malinda S. Smith, Alberta, Canada

Despite its difficulties, I think we all agree that a lot of good things came out of Durban, things that we should all appreciate, things that should form the basis for our present

and future work to eradicate what brought us all there in the first place; disrespect, abuse and violence towards people that simply happen to be born in a particular place, with a particular colour of skin, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, social status, nationality, religion. Having said that, there is another reason that we all went to Durban for and we more often than not seem to forget; our will and commitment to change things for the better, to put things right if you will; our strong belief in equality, diversity and human rights. It is this spirit that ought to prevail and unite us in our fight against injustice.

Elina Stamou, Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG), Great-Britain

The I CARE project, UNITED for Intercultural Action and Magenta Foundation owe special thanks to the Dutch ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs, the European Union, the Council of Europe and the governments of Switzerland, Norway, Great-Britain and Canada for making their work around the World Conference Against Racism possible.

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