

**AS DELIVERED**

**PERMANENT MISSION OF INDIA, GENEVA**

**DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE**

**(20-24 April 2009)**

**Statement by Mr Vivek Katju**

**Special Secretary (Political & International Organisations)**

**Ministry of External Affairs**

**(21 Apr 2009)**

Mr. President, Madam High Commissioner, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies & Gentlemen,

We congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election as President of this Conference. We would like to express our appreciation for the sagacious address by the UN Secretary-General.

Mr. President,

Eight years ago, we gathered in Durban for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. We adopted a historic Declaration and a Programme of Action. We meet again to renew our commitment to the Declaration and review the Programme of Action with the objective of finding ways and means of strengthening its implementation.

This Review Conference is taking place amidst a global economic and financial crisis of grave magnitude and at a time when the scourge of terrorism seeks to undermine our security and freedoms. It is inevitable that these challenges compel attention. However, even while we focus on them, we cannot lose sight of the continuing need to address core issues of racism and ensure that peoples of African and Asian descent and others who are facing, in many cases, fresh discrimination do not join the ranks of those victims of racism who in the past had no redress.

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For India, the issues of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance hold a special significance. India was a victim of colonialism. Colonialism was rooted in the notion of racial superiority; racism had been the very bedrock of colonialism. Millions and millions suffered from racist colonial exploitation; so did Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. As a young barrister in South Africa, he had embarked on a railway journey in a first class compartment. He was thrown out merely because of the colour of his skin. That journey led in time to Mahatma Gandhi embarking on another journey - of resistance to colonialism, to racial discrimination. Millions joined Gandhiji in his epic journey. He forged the weapon of Satyagraha, that is truth and non-violence, and through Satyagraha India achieved freedom from colonialism.

When we framed our Constitution sixty years ago, we embedded in it the very essence of equality and our determination to eradicate racism. Article 15 of the Indian Constitution expressly prohibits discrimination on the ground of, *inter alia*, race. The Constitution of India pioneered the largest affirmative action programme in the world. India is the world's largest multi-religious democracy based on the rule of law and secularism, and is determined to further improve the lot of all its people, in particular the weak, the vulnerable and the historically disadvantaged.

Nothing has empowered our people, including the weak and disadvantaged sections of our society, more than the exercise of the fundamental democratic right to elect their representatives in the legislatures and through that process, the government. Today, India is in the process of electing the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, or the House of the People, involving an electorate of 714 million people, over 828 thousand polling stations, 1.37 million electronic voting machines and 5.5 million polling officials to elect 543 Members of Parliament.

Mr. President,

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Remaining faithful to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), we must seek to craft more effective means to enhance its implementation so as to make a difference on the ground to the victims of racial discrimination.

The outcome of the present Review Conference should be forward-looking and realistic in its approach. The draft outcome document makes an appropriate assessment of the effectiveness of the existing Durban follow-up mechanisms and other UN mechanisms dealing with the issues of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It also makes an appropriate assessment of efforts to promote the implementation of the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination and the sharing of best practices. It contains useful suggestions on further concrete measures and initiatives that we should consider seriously.

Mr. President, the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action was an expression of our desire to eliminate the deep scars of racial discrimination. We must ensure that we do not falter in our efforts and that we do not allow the many challenges we face to deter us from our task. And as always, Mr. President, my delegation pledges itself to work closely with all other delegations in our collective endeavour to combat racial discrimination.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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