

Statement by Ambassador Milos Alcalay, Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations and Chairman of the Group of 77, before the Third Committee of the General Assembly on Agenda item 117: Elimination of Racism and Racial Discrimination

New York, 31 January 2002

Mr. Chairman,

Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, let me take this opportunity to register our deep gratitude and appreciation to the People and Government of the Republic of South Africa for the successful hosting of the World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. This historical gathering can indeed be considered the culmination of a long, collective international struggle against racism. The preparatory process for the Durban Conference was long and tortuous, the negotiations hard and painstaking. The Conference itself, as we all vividly remember, had to go through high-pitched political and diplomatic wrangling before it could finally come to agreement on the Declaration and the Programme of Action. Thanks to the dedication of all actors involved in the process; governmental representatives, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the United Nations system, and international organizations and institutions – not to mention the irreplaceable flexibility and disposition to consensus of the negotiators - the Conference reached final success. And to be sure, the Conference should have achieved more. But, that is history now. Moreover, the very fact that the final outcome is not yet available bespeaks of some of the complexities involved in the process, which we hope, would be resolved soon and with an outcome acceptable to the collectivity of the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

With the preceding in perspective and taking the final outcome of the Durban Conference as what now have before us, one could say in all fairness that it is a good outcome. The Declaration, drawing on the outcome of previous conferences as well as the rich, elaborate and ever-proliferating body of existing legal instruments, including those in the filed of human rights, lays out, in detail, the common perspective and analysis of the international community on various aspects and dimensions of the evils of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including their sources, causes, forms and contemporary manifestations. The Declaration we adopted in Durban, more than its predecessors, is a definitive manifesto in condemnation of the long repudiated notions and concepts of racial superiority and apartheid.

It should be a matter of great satisfaction to all of us that the Conference and hence, the Declaration, have acknowledged, in clear and unambiguous terms, the appalling tragedies of slavery and slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, as crimes against humanity and that they should have always been so. The recognition that colonialism has led to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and the consequent affirmation that whenever and wherever it occurred, it must be condemned and its reoccurrence prevented are very valuable assertions on the part of the international community. Belated as it might have been, nevertheless, the acknowledgement of the suffering caused by colonialism and the lasting social and economic inequalities it has caused in many parts of the world today is to be welcomed and appreciated. Equally important and commendable is the Declaration's emphasis on the necessity of paying special attention to new manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The Declaration's recognition of the causal relationship between poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion and economic disparities on the one hand and racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the other is a very important assertion. This finds its particular relevance in the context of a still unfolding globalization process and its complicating impact and effects, particularly for the developing countries.

Over and above the Declaration as the overall new world vision for a long-term struggle against racism and racial discrimination, the Durban Conference produced the Programme of Action; an elaborate set of strategies, policies, actions and measures to be implemented at national, regional and international levels. The recommendations in this document cover all relevant areas where the combat against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance should be undertaken.

Mr. Chairman,

The Durban Conference, having been held two years before the end of the Third Decade of international struggle and action against racism and racial discrimination, represents a higher level of understanding at all levels of the complexities involved in the successful and effective pursuit and implementation of previous agreements. It reflects achievements, shortcomings, obstacles, and more importantly, current and emerging challenges. It as well represents an assessment of the lessons learnt. And as such, it has provided the international community, all of us on both sides of the development divide, with a new, comprehensive blueprint for strategy, policy and action. We should all welcome this better understanding and appreciation and shared global concern and sensitivity at the very beginning of the new century and the new Millennium. And at the practical level, we should undertake, on our respective parts, to ensure that the agreed objectives will be achieved in the years to come.

The Programme of Action, as alluded earlier, contains a wide range of relevant strategies, policies, actions and measures. What is needed, first and foremost, is the requisite political will for its dynamic, meaningful, effective follow-up and implementation on a par with other major world conferences and commensurate with the magnitude and scope of the problems involved and the lofty objectives agreed upon. And that certainly applies to all levels. Let me underline right here that I fully concur with Mrs. Mary Robinson, distinguished High Commissioner for Human Rights, that “The World Conference will be a landmark in the struggle to eradicate all forms of racial discrimination. It will require a strong follow-up mechanism to examine whether governments have delivered on the promises made at the dawn of the new Millennium.” Yes, for the international community to move, in a concrete manner, towards achieving the goals and objectives of the World Conference a set of very practical measures with time-bound targets at various levels and in different areas are needed.

As rightly underlined in the Declaration, the struggle against racism and racial discrimination is to be based on human solidarity and waged through cooperation, partnership and inclusion, needless to say, at all levels. At the national level, equal participation of all individuals and peoples in the formation of just, equitable, democratic and inclusive societies is imperative. This requires, inter alia, effective promulgation of necessary and adequate legislation and establishment and strengthening of requisite institutions and structures in the legislative, judicial, administrative, educational and information fields. Education plays a central, critical role in the overall national strategy to promote understanding among society at large and to fight racism and racial discrimination. It should be considered as a significant means of creating awareness at the level of the whole society, particularly among young people and more so in our day and age, with regard to new forms of racism and racial discrimination. The critical contribution of education, including political education, towards promoting respect for the human rights of others, respect for tolerance and diversity hardly needs to be emphasized.

While reiterating the centrality of national policy and action for an effective struggle against racism and racial discrimination, it is equally necessary to underline the significance and catalytic role of international cooperation. This calls, first of all, for the necessary political will at the level of the whole international community, inclusive in particular of the United Nations system, to accord high priority to this struggle as a common global enterprise. Forceful pursuit of the objective of universal acceptance of relevant international legal instruments, including through effective advocacy campaign and awareness-raising, constitutes an important step and measure in this regard. As in all other international, multilateral processes, effective,

successful pursuit of the agreements and actual realization of the set objectives depends, in the final analysis, on the mobilization of needed resources, financial and otherwise. This is the Achilles Heel of it all. The willingness and ability of the international community, the United Nations included, to undertake to mobilize and provide the resources for the active follow-up and implementation of the Durban Programme of Action will be judged as a tangible measuring rod of the needed will and determination. In this particular respect, we find Mrs. Robinson's words in her mid-October briefing on the on-going activities of her Office in post-Durban period positive and reassuring. In so far as advocacy is concerned, the designation of the Human Rights Day – 10 December – to mark international combat against racism is a welcome development.

Mr. Chairman,

Before concluding, let me also say a brief word on the substance of the matter at hand. Earlier in the statement, I alluded to our higher level of collective understanding of the phenomenon of racism and racial discrimination. This new and better nuanced understanding and appreciation of the origins and contributing factors should provide us – all of us in the human family – with the necessary means and tools towards making institutional changes to eliminate racism and racial discrimination, including in their new and emerging forms. At the macro, global level, it is imperative for the international community to commit itself to the promotion of a culture of harmony and peace, based on equal dignity and worth of all human beings, justice and tolerance within and between communities and nations. This should be considered as a global campaign, cognizant of diversity, and geared to the promotion and enhancement of mutual understanding and sharing. The unending journey of the human caravan can be ensured only through understanding, tolerance, sharing and cooperation.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China reaffirms its firm commitment to the actual realization of the vision outlined in the final outcome of the World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. We stand willing and ready to cooperate, in good faith, with the rest of the international community and all stakeholders, at all levels, towards devising an effective, dynamic follow-up mechanism for the implementation of the Durban outcome. The draft resolutions we have prepared in this regard attest to this commitment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.