



TWELFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Other questions: Preparations for the
World Conference against Racism, Racial
Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related
Intolerance****(a) General overview**

1. The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance will take place from 31 August–7 September 2001, in Durban, South Africa. Following the two conferences held on this subject in Geneva in 1978 and 1983, this will be the third United Nations summit related to combating racism and racial discrimination. The General Assembly has appointed the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to be Secretary-General of the World Conference. The preparatory process for the World Conference includes two sessions of the Commission on Human Rights, acting as the Preparatory Committee, four regional preparatory meetings, a series of expert seminars, as well as numerous activities organized by non-governmental organizations.
2. The Preparatory Committee decided at its first session, which was held from 1-5 May 2000, to adopt for the World Conference the slogan “United to Combat Racism: Equality, Justice, Dignity”.¹ The first Preparatory Committee also adopted the provisional rules of procedure of the World Conference as well as five broad themes to be included in the provisional agenda of the Conference.² The High Commissioner for Human Rights was invited to draw up a draft declaration and programme of action for the World Conference, on the basis of the outcome of the regional preparatory meetings and the expert seminars,

¹ Report of the Commission on Human Rights acting as the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance on its first session (1-5 May 2000), A/55/307, Annex I (decisions adopted by the Preparatory Committee at its first session).

² The themes as adopted are the following: (1) Sources, causes, forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; (2) Victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; (3) Measures of prevention, education and protection aimed at the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at the national, regional and international levels; (4) Provision of effective remedies, recourse, redress, (compensatory) and other measures at the national, regional and international levels; (5) Strategies to achieve full and effective equality, including international cooperation and enhancement of the United Nations and other international mechanisms in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and follow-up.

as well as of other contributions sought from States Members of the United Nations, United Nations specialized agencies and regional organizations involved in the preparation of the regional meetings and seminars, the regional commissions and all United Nations programmes and bodies, representatives of United Nations human rights mechanisms and concerned non-governmental organizations.

3. The European regional preparatory meeting took place from 11-13 October 2000 in Strasbourg, France, under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The Regional Conference of the Americas in preparation of the World Conference was held in Santiago, Chile, from 5-7 December 2000. The African Regional Preparatory Conference took place from 22-24 January 2001 in Dakar, Senegal. The regional meeting for Asia was held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, from 19-21 February 2001. NGO forums on the subject preceded all the regional meetings.
4. The Preparatory Committee held informal consultations on 15 and 16 January 2001 to identify sub-themes for the provisional agenda. An inter-sessional open-ended working group of the Preparatory Committee was held from 6-9 March 2001 to consider the draft declaration and programme of action. The Preparatory Committee is requested to develop further the draft declaration and programme of action and to draw up a provisional agenda for the World Conference at its second session (21 May–1 June 2001).

(b) ILO contributions

5. The mandate of the ILO encompasses the objectives proclaimed for the World Conference as they relate to the world of work. The promotion of decent work seeks to ensure that all men and women workers are able to engage in productive activities in dignity, free from hindrance of racial bias or discriminatory treatment. The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), is the main ILO instrument containing the principle of non-discrimination, inter alia, on the basis of race, colour and national extraction. Other relevant standards that concern the elimination of racial discrimination include those for migrant workers, indigenous and tribal peoples and child labour. The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work explicitly refers to the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. The fourth Global Report under the follow-up to the Declaration (2003) will focus on non-discrimination.
6. Given the specific mandate and experience of the ILO, the Office has taken an active part in the preparations for the World Conference through participation in all regional preparatory meetings, the expert seminars convened by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the first session of the Preparatory Committee, as well as through involvement in the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly under the relevant agenda items. Written comments on relevant ILO activities have been submitted to the first session of the Preparatory Committee and to the Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission. The Office is also undertaking several studies and projects, which are intended to contribute positively to the process. An intersectoral working group on the World Conference has been established in the Office.
7. The overall objective of the ILO efforts is to ensure that the importance of combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance at the workplace and the economic and social effects of such discrimination, are being appropriately recognized by the preparatory process and the Conference itself.³ An important element of

³ Participation in the World Conference of specialized agencies as observers is provided for under rule 61 of the provisional rules of procedure; cf. UN Doc. A/55/307, Annex IV.

the ILO message is that the World Conference should stress that full realization of economic and social rights, without discrimination, including, in particular, the right to decent work and the right to education, is central to preventing and combating racism in all its forms. The Conference should also recognize that the elimination of discrimination in the workplace is vital to reducing racial and ethnic tension in society, thus contributing to conflict prevention. Male and female migrant workers, persons belonging to minorities, and indigenous and tribal peoples and children should be recognized as being among those particularly vulnerable and affected by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Their situation in employment and occupation requires special attention and targeted measures. Involvement, consultation and participation of persons affected, in particular organizations of workers and employers, in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes to counter discrimination on racial grounds and xenophobia, is particularly crucial. Further, the racial implications of child labour need to be highlighted by the World Conference. Child labour, and its worst forms more so than others, perpetuate poverty and inequality along racial or ethnic lines by disproportionately denying children from groups affected the opportunity to acquire the human capabilities needed in productive life and to benefit from economic growth. Any strategy adopted by the World Conference should include the establishment and strengthening of mechanisms, procedures and institutions at the national level to address cases of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, including those occurring at work. Having in mind the call of the previous world conferences for ratification of specific ILO Conventions, it is important that the upcoming Conference calls upon States to ratify and apply the most pertinent ILO Conventions in the field of non-discrimination. An effective and coordinated follow-up to the World Conference will also take into account the activities and experience of all relevant parts of the United Nations system. Regarding racism in employment and occupation, the 2003 Global Report and the action plan to be adopted that year under the ILO Declaration will be a major contribution to this follow-up.

8. In addition to the aforementioned concerns, ILO involvement in the World Conference and its preparatory process is aiming, as appropriate, at providing relevant expertise and general awareness-raising of ILO activities and instruments in the field of combating racism, xenophobia and racial discrimination in employment and occupation.
9. Issues related to racism as it affects workers and the world of work have so far been incorporated to a significant degree in the documents prepared by the regional preparatory meetings. The Office has also closely worked with the secretariat and has succeeded in drawing attention to various concerns of the ILO. The elements for a draft declaration and programme of action for the World Conference prepared by the secretariat as the basis of work for the remaining preparatory meetings take up several suggestions made by the Office in this sense,⁴ and further efforts will be made to ensure that issues of concern will be taken up in the draft declaration and programme of action to be submitted to and adopted by the World Conference. To this end, active participation in the inter-sessional working group and the second session of the Preparatory Committee is envisaged. In addition, the Office will continue to cooperate and liaise closely with the secretariat of the World Conference in the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights.

Geneva, 7 March 2001.

⁴ World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Elements for a draft declaration and programme of action for the World Conference; Note by the Secretary-General, 22 February 2001, A/CONF.189/WG.1/3.