

Caucasians United for Reparations and Emancipation
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Shameful U.S. Boycott Must Be Opposed

When the Obama administration announced it would boycott the upcoming UN Durban Review Conference in Geneva, designed as a follow-up to the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa, news media insisted the boycott had to do with Israel. But a decision that has followed the boycott seems to indicate the second half of the Obama administration's demand -- that references to reparations be taken out of the document -- may have been just as, if not more, important.

Ten years ago the Bush administration did participate in the preparatory meetings prior to the 2001 WCAR. At one of the meetings with NGOs, Bush's people could be heard making their best argument: slavery was private enterprise and it wasn't against the law when it occurred. Despite pressure from the U.S. and Europe, it appeared that the African States were forming a coalition with the Latin American States in favor of strong language that associated slavery with present day racism, the trans-Atlantic slave trade with crimes against humanity, and [which] identified reparations as a possible solution. When Bush's people saw they couldn't have things their way, they decided to walk out of the conference.

Fast forward to three years ago when the UN began its preparation to hold the WCAR follow-up conference. After a number of meetings the preparatory committee decided, in early 2008, that the task of the conference would be to examine the implementation of the 2001 WCAR Program and Plan of Action. In April of 2008 the provisional agenda was prepared and in October the preparatory committee began drafting the outcome document, which contains the conclusions and recommendations of the conference.

That's when negative media reports gave us our first public glimpse of backroom manipulations already underway. In December the UN distributed a press release to combat media reports that Libya, Cuba and Iran had seized control of the draft outcome document. This supposedly was happening because Libya was the Chair and Cuba and Iran held Vice-chair positions. The UN countered the media reports by stating that Chair is a procedural seat only, and it named 17 other Vice-chairs including many European States. The UN accused the Wall Street Journal and The Australian, in particular, of distortions.

In January of 2009 governments started negotiating on the preparatory committee's draft outcome document.

When Barack Obama was sworn in as President, many people believed that the U.S. position would change. But rather than simply deciding to participate, the Obama administration announced that it wanted to assess the negotiations on the outcome document. In February the announcement came that the U.S. would boycott the conference unless its outcome document is changed to drop all references to Israel and the defamation of religion. A second U.S. demand (underplayed in the media) was that the conference should not take up the issue of reparations for slavery. The Obama team announced also that they would be prepared to re-engage if the negotiations brought about a "shortened" text of the document that met the criteria.

Nearing the end of March, one month away from the April 20-24 conference, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights announced that there had been agreement on a significantly shorter draft outcome document. She said she hoped that it would be a "major turning point." Unfortunately, it was a major turning point; turning away from the spirit that was embodied in the 2001 WCAR.

Vernillia Randall, Law Professor at University of Dayton, described the decision as devastating. In her March/09 newsletter she stated, "Unfortunately, the Durban Review Conference is being hijacked by governments and members of civil society, including the Obama administration, who may not have the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, especially for African and People of African Descent, as their highest priority. In fact, in just the last week, in response to the Obama administration ultimatum, the Durban review committee:

- * withdrew language related to reparations;
- * removed the proposed paragraph related to the transatlantic slave trade being a crime against humanity;
- * removed proposed paragraphs designed to strengthen the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent; and,
- * overall weakened the efforts related to people of African Descent."

According to news reports, after the revisions were made the Obama administration indicated it was pleased by the progress and it had not shut the door on attending, but there were still a few things to be addressed.

A number of Black Reparations leaders from the U.S. plan to attend the conference with the stated purpose of defending the right to reparations.

Unfortunately, the outcome document will be nearly set in stone by the time the conference takes place, so the leaders will have a hard fight. Keep in mind that the outcome document of this conference is not law, but it is an agreement, negotiated by governments, to make improvements and, as such, it is vital to peoples who suffer racism and discrimination. The reparations leaders will use every means they can to make their demands heard and gain ground in the final version.

We urge all white Americans who are concerned about racism to join in this battlefield now by contacting President Barack Obama. Tell him you want to see a U.S. team fully participating in this upcoming international conference. Ask him how a "changed" administration could bully and manipulate the conference and not participate in it when racism plagues us and the lingering effects of slavery burden us all. Those who are fighting this battle for us in Geneva deserve broad support. Please do your best to assist them by lifting up your voice here at home.

Please write or call:

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