



**Preparatory Committee for the Durban Review Conference, 1<sup>st</sup> Substantive Session, Geneva, 23 April 2008**

**Item 6: Joint Statement by Canadian NGOs on the Review of the Implementation of the *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA)* by all stakeholders**

I represent the African Canadian Legal Clinic. I am making this Joint Statement on behalf of our organization and several other Canadian anti-racism NGO's, namely:

- Canadian Arab Federation
- Canadian Council for Refugees
- Chinese Canadian National Council (National and Ottawa)
- Jamaican Canadian Association
- Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
- National Anti-Racism Council of Canada
- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
- South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario
- Urban Alliance on Race Relations

We represent a broad cross section of Canada's diverse communities. We are African Canadians, Arabs, Asians, South Asians, immigrants and refugees. We share the common goal and commitment to combat racism and discrimination in all its forms.

Most of us played an active role in the World Conference in Durban in 2001. Through our participation, we fulfilled the important civil society role that is a vital part, not only of Canadian domestic human rights protection, but also of the multilateral international human rights process.

In our view, the follow-up review mechanisms of the implementation of the DDPA must encompass all countries, such as Canada, who have agreed to the DDPA but have disengaged from the Durban Review Conference. This is in order to ensure their effectiveness. The commitments in the DDPA to combat racism and protect victims of discrimination should apply to all countries who have agreed to the DDPA whether or not they have opted to remain in the process.

We are expressing our great disappointment with the Canadian Government's decision to withdraw from the Durban Review Conference.

This decision to withdraw was made without consultation from all affected sectors of civil society. In particular, excluded from consultation were those who were on the ground at Durban and who have for the past six years worked with the Canadian government on critical anti-racism initiatives stemming from the World Conference.

In our view, the World Conference was a groundbreaking watershed event for the racialized communities that we represent not just in Canada, but all over the world. It created global networks between anti-racism NGOs, provided a voice for vulnerable communities who have

long been unheard, and strengthened community capacities internationally. It resulted in the DDPA which provides a positive, action oriented blueprint for governments, working with civil society, to combat racism.

As Canadian NGOs we unequivocally condemned certain racist and discriminatory activities that took place during the separate NGO Forum in Durban. While these incidents marred the overall and commendable efforts of NGO's to combat racism, they were not broad based and did not extend to and turn the state World Conference, into the "racist" event that some have characterized it to be.

Since Durban, the Canadian government has shown its commitment to implementing the DDPA. In 2004, our then Minister of Foreign Affairs Bill Graham, in a statement to the Commission on Human Rights here in Geneva, affirmed Canada's commitment to implementing the positive elements of the DDPA. Since Durban, Canadian NGO's have collaborated with the government on its *National Plan of Action* and other anti-racism efforts.

For us, the Durban Review Conference provides a critical opportunity to take stock of state efforts to date.

As such, we were deeply shocked and concerned with our government's withdrawal from the Review Conference. In addition to the lack of civil society consultation, for us Canada's withdrawal represents an abdication of the international commitments it made when it agreed to the DDPA.

As Canadians, we have taken pride in the leadership that Canada has taken in the past on various human rights issues. Canada must remain an active partner in multilateral human rights processes. Canada must be at the table, as it was in 2001, to participate in the global effort to protect victims of racism and to ensure that the Durban Review process remains bias free. We believe that walking away from the Review Conference will not achieve these important goals. Instead, it sends a message, intentional or not, of Canada's abandonment of its commitment to combating racism domestically and globally.

We urge the member states at this Preparatory Committee to move forward positively, to engage in constructive dialogue with each other and with civil society, and to act on their responsibilities and commitments in the DDPA, in order to ensure the protection of the human rights of victims of racism and discrimination everywhere.