

ERITREA

STATEMENT BY

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AT

THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION,
XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA, 2 SEPTEMBER 2001

Madam President,

I wish to join the other delegates before me in congratulating you and your colleagues in the Bureau on your election. I also seize this opportunity to extend on behalf of the people and the government of the State of Eritrea, heartfelt condolences to H.E. President Tabo Mbeki and his family as well as to the people of the South Africa on the death of Govan Mbeki - an African hero.

Madam President,

This conference is yet another milestone in humanity's struggle and search for the essential elements which would enable it to create societies which would foster an equal, free and fair co-existence based on mutual respect and tolerance. It offers us with both challenges and opportunities. It challenges us to engage ourselves in a sober analysis of the dangers posed by the new forms of racism and its attendant policies of exclusion and discrimination, deportation, internment, ethnic cleansing, displacement and other barbarities that have blemished our past haunt our present and threaten our future. Yet, it also gives us the opportunity to prevent a recurrence of past and present evils and monstrosities and to create an enabling environment and the favorable conditions, that promote harmony, peace and cooperation between nations and equality and mutual respect between peoples.

Madam President,

Even as we celebrate the dismantling of Apartheid, we note with great dismay that old and new forms of racism and racial discrimination, as well as the pseudoscientific theories that support them, are rearing their ugly heads in many parts of the world, including the Horn of Africa, and are having dire consequences on human relations at every level of interaction. Racism has indeed assumed subtle forms, comes encoded in ethnic and religious virtues and is being glorified by several Groups as a supremely suitable form of societal organization.

I find this pretext, it has in some glaring cases been possible to install ethno-Apartheid systems where one ethnic group monopolizes power and a comprehensive system of ethnic domination is established. Ironically, such a system is initiated and implemented in the name of self-determination, equality, freedom and respect for the dignity of human beings.

Consequently, it is impossible for the other ethnic groups in such a society to enjoy human rights on an equal footing with the ruling ethnic group or to participate in the political, economic, cultural or any other field of public life. Such marginalized populations, which usually constitute the overwhelming majority, are exposed to mass starvation, massive health hazards and ignorance while their lands are turned into ecological disasters as they are plundered by the ruling ethnic group to satisfy its insatiable ethnic needs.

It is inevitable that such a virulent ethno-nationalism would lead, to an aggressive and ruthless foreign policy of hegemonism and manifest destiny, which impels the state to totally disregard international law and behavior and systematically violate the principles enshrined in all the international instruments which govern inter-state relations.

Madam President,

The people of Eritrea have been the victims of racist oppression and discrimination for almost one century under three colonial administrations. Italian colonialism, and most particularly during the fascist period an official racial policy, which discriminated on the basis of race, was adopted and ruthlessly implemented. Its economic (land), cultural, educational and social policies (including segregation in public places, transport, cinemas and theatres, schools etc.) almost rival the Apartheid ideology and system. The British Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA) continued to apply fascist laws and policies under the pretext, albeit technically correct, that it had to respect international instruments applicable to occupied enemy territories.

During the forty years rule of the last colonial country, racism manifested itself very strongly, both officially and unofficially, in the political, economic and cultural life of our country. In its determination to completely obliterate our cultural heritages, traditions and languages with a view to blotting out our national soul, identity and sense of unity, the colonial country had systematically foisted on us its values, language and laws. This was meticulously carried out by an alien bureaucracy, and enforced brutally by the colonial country's security and police forces and officially sanctioned thugs.

Madam President,

Eritrea's commitment to the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination has a history going back to the earliest days of the liberation struggle. Indeed, it was part of the liberation struggle.

A country composed of nine ethnic groups and major religions had necessity to retrieve and benefit from its pre-colonial heritage, a heritage nurtured and enriched by diversity but mangled by colonial divide and rule. After independence, the Ministry of Justice undertook a systematic review of the colonial country's legislation with a view to expurgating that which was not in consonance with all human rights conventions including in particular related to ethnicity gender religion and age. Convinced that racism and racial intolerance were closely related to, and are rooted in economic conditions the government had made sure that all Eritreans will have the right to be engaged equally and fruitfully in, and benefit equally from, the economic activities of the country.

Madam President,

It has become increasingly evident that racism, racial discrimination and the policies of exclusion are no longer a matter of the internal affairs of a state. They have regional and international ramifications and consequences.

It is also equally evident that legal provisions alone cannot eradicate racism racial discrimination. Xenophobia and related intolerance. Satisfactory solutions can be achieved only if the legal provisions are supplemented by the concerted promotion of social justice, fairness, equality of opportunity to, and equal participation by, all in the political and economic life of society. To this end it is essential that the international community takes appropriate collective measures to discourage the creation of ethnic - based exclusionary states.

Madam President,

I wish to conclude by emphasizing that the declaration which we adopt must unequivocally condemn colonialism, slavery and the slave trade as not only immoral but also as crimes against humanity request for a public apology and demand for adequate compensation.

I Thank You!