

HIGHLIGHTS OF DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

22 April 2009

Ramu Damodaran, Spokesman for the Durban Review Conference, introduced Mohammed Al-Tarawneh, Member of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, who was the guest at today's press briefing.

The Spokesman drew attention to the updated list of speakers for the high-level and general segments, which were available to the media, indicating that between today and tomorrow there were nearly 80 speakers who remained to speak. This morning nine dignitaries spoke at the high-level segment after which the general segment began. The general segment will continue through the afternoon into tomorrow. There were 68 speakers inscribed to speak under the general segment at present, which reflected a notable increase in the number of speakers as a result of additional names added over the last 24 hours. The list remained open and other names may still be added. Moreover, the total number of speakers who already spoke and who remain to speak at the Conference now stands at 127; 59 during the high-level segment and 68 during the general segment.

As regards Conference participation, there were 143 States and Observers who had registered to attend the Conference, Mr. Damodaran reported. As for NGO participation, Rupert Colville, Spokesman for the OHCHR, indicated that, to date, there were 314 NGOs and 1,073 NGO delegates accredited to the Conference. Responding to questions posed earlier, Mr. Colville indicated that 45 individuals representing NGOs and one member of the media had their badges withdrawn for disruptive behaviour that violated the code of conduct for NGOs attending the Conference; 11 on Monday and 35 between Tuesday and today. The breakdown was as follows: 21 individuals from *L'Union des Etudiants Juifs de France*; 15 from Co-exist; 4 from the European Union of Jewish Students; 2 from the Neda Institute; 2 from the Women's Association of Followers of Ahlul Baitii; 1 from B'nai Brith; and 1 from Israel Harom.

In response to questions previously raised as regards the budget for the Durban Review process, Mr. Damodaran stated that the total estimated cost for the Durban Review process stood at 5.3 million USD (3.7 million regular budget and 1.6 million extra budget). This figure covered all the conference servicing costs (interpretation, translation, etc), temporary staff expenses and travel expenses and covered the meetings held over the last year building up to the actual Conference being held this week. In particular, the two sessions of the Intergovernmental Working Group, which took place in May and September 2008; the three Preparatory Committee sessions, held in April and October 2008, and the third session last week; the inter-sessional open-ended intergovernmental working group meetings, approximately 20 days worth of meeting held over the course of last year and this year building up to the current Conference; the regional conferences held in Brazil and Nigeria last year; and, as mentioned yesterday, the estimated cost for conference servicing for this week's event, which alone amounted to 675,200 USD. The breakdown and further details were available in a public document of the UN General Assembly 5th Committee (budget committee), with the symbol A/C.5/63/17.

Mr. Damodaran also drew attention to a series of [side events](#) taking place over the next few days, among them the open forum organized by the OHCHR entitled "Voices: Everyone affected by racism has a story that should be heard".



Responding to a question, Mr. Damodaran said it was prerogative of the chair of any meeting to make a decision to halt a speech and consequently the prerogative of any delegation to challenge that decision.

Giving the floor to the guest at the briefing, the Spokesman noted that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was one of the principal outcomes of the 2001 Durban Conference on Racism and that negotiations on the Convention began shortly thereafter and the Convention itself was adopted in December 2006.

Mohammed Al-Tarawneh, Member of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, recalling that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force in March 2008, noted that 52 countries has thus far ratified the Convention and the Committee was working hard to encourage other States to do so. This was the latest treaty in the 21st century and took only four years between negotiations and entry into force, making it one of the fastest treaties to be finalized. The main aim of the Convention was to protect, promote and ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities. The main principle of the Convention was based on the respect for dignity, non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, equal opportunities, gender equality and respect for children.

Mr. Al-Tarawneh said it was regrettable that only a few States, thus far, had mentioned the Convention and/or persons with disabilities in their interventions during the high-level segment of the Conference. The mandate of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which began its work in January this year, was to monitor the compliance of ratifying States to the Convention. The Committee also tried to encourage States to lift reservations and to encourage other States to sign and ratify the Convention.

There were some 650 million people living with disabilities worldwide, Mr. Al-Tarawneh noted. The adoption of the Convention in December 2006 began a new era in which persons with disabilities would no longer have to suffer from discriminatory practices and attitudes that have prevailed for a long time. People living with disabilities often faced discrimination on many fronts; for example, disabled women and children living in poverty. Referring to WHO statistics, he said roughly 10% of any population would have people with disabilities, whereas in conflict zones this figure can expectedly go up to 50%. In Gaza, for example, it would appear that the percentage of persons with disabilities would be as high as 80%.

Responding to a question Mr. Al-Tarawneh noted that the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities held its first session in February this year and emphasized that its job was to examine the extent to which State parties had been implementing the provisions of the Convention. He also noted that nearly 140 States had signed the Convention, including the 52 ratifications. Attention was also drawn to the Optional Protocol to the Convention which gave the right of any individual to file a claim against a State which would be channelled through to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, after exhausting all domestic legal remedies.

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