



NELSON MANDELA  
FOUNDATION

*Living the Legacy*

**Statement by H.E. Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, to be read at the official opening ceremony of the Review Conference, 20 April 2009**

*Dear Friends, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*

We regret not being able to join you today but we are particularly honoured to be adding, however modestly, to your discussions. Your work here will further contribute to the advancement of the noble struggle for equality and justice, a struggle that we must wage tirelessly, irrespective of the obstacles that we will inevitably encounter.

The September 2001 Conference against Racism, held in Durban, and the resultant "Durban Declaration and Programme of Action" has been hailed as providing the most comprehensive framework of our time to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and all other forms of intolerance.

We in South Africa have learned that discrimination against and the stigmatization of one part of the population devalued the humanity not only of the victims, but of all the people of our country.

This Review Conference taking place in Geneva is an opportunity not only to assess the progress the world has made in translating into action the commitments made in Durban in 2001, but to renew our spirit and strengthen our will to turn the goals we set 8 years ago into reality. It is also an opportunity to engage with and draw in a new leadership, with new visions, that have emerged in nations crucial to this endeavour.

We know that in conferences of this nature there are bound to be disagreement and divergences of opinion. Given the diversity of the people and the interest of states participating in the conference, such divergences are normal and indeed healthy. We must however not allow differences of opinion to ever paralyze our efforts towards attaining a world free of racial bigotry, hatred, discrimination and intolerance.

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Let us always remember that the victims of these phenomena are children, men and women, in their millions. Do not allow their dignity, their human right to life, peace and prosperity be compromised because of often obscure differences among policy makers. It is in your hands to make a difference.

I wish you a successful conference, and I thank you.