Why is Biden indifferent to a UN celebration of anti-Semitism?

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At the U.N. Human Rights Council last Friday, Americans learned something important about the Biden administration’s views on combating racism and xenophobia. Paradoxically, equality for the many is to be built on the inequality of the Jewish few. Abandoning 20 years of strong bipartisan concern about anti-Semitism, President Joe Biden’s State Department took the lead in embracing the U.N. hate-fest held in 2001 in Durban, South Africa.

The [“Durban Declaration,”](https://www.un.org/WCAR/durban.pdf) adopted three days before 9/11, encourages the hatred of Jews. It is the 21st-century reincarnation of the infamous 1975 U.N. General Assembly “Zionism is Racism” resolution. Israel is the only state mentioned in the entire global manifesto, which claims that Palestinians are “victims” of Israeli racism. Actually, it is Palestinian Arabs who reject peaceful cohabitation with Jews, insist on a state without Jews and [officially](http://www.humanrightsvoices.org/assets/attachments/documents/Palestinian_TFA.pdf) [reward](https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1164/text) Palestinians who kill Jews.

The racist “anti-racism” conference that produced the declaration featured disturbing scenes of overt, violent anti-Semitism. The American delegation, led by Hungarian Holocaust survivor and Rep. [Tom Lantos](https://dl.tufts.edu/concern/pdfs/tx31qt958) (D-Calif.), walked out of the reprehensible governmental conference, together with Israel, fully supported by Secretary of State Colin Powell.

That was America’s response to Jew-hatred in 2001, and it was repeated in the years following.

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The United States and others boycotted successive attempts to resuscitate Durban: “Durban II” (the “Durban Review Conference”) held in Geneva in 2009, and Durban III, a 10th-anniversary summit in New York in 2011. Both events “reaffirmed” the original Durban Declaration. At Durban II, the United Nations handed Holocaust-denier and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a microphone to open the conference. Which he [did](http://www.humanrightsvoices.org/EYEontheUN/antisemitism/durban/?l=36&p=815) with these words: “The word Zionism personifies racism that falsely resorts to religion and abuses religious sentiments to hide their hatred and ugly faces.”

The U.N. juggernaut has rolled on, given Durban’s centrality to the Palestinian program of demonizing and isolating the Jewish state ever since PLO chief Yasser Arafat took the podium at Durban I. And so, on Dec. 31, 2020, the U.N. General Assembly [decided](https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/237) to hold a commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Durban Declaration. It will take place in New York in September of this year. World leaders, gathered for the General Assembly’s opening, are now scheduled to adopt a “political declaration” calling for the “full and effective implementation” of the Durban Declaration, thereby pursuing the aim of isolating Israel as a racist pariah on the global stage.

Consistent with its rejection of every similar pro-Durban resolution since 2001, the United States voted against the plan to convene what is in effect a “Durban IV.” In fact, it voted [against](https://usun.usmission.gov/explanation-of-vote-by-ambassador-kelly-craft-on-the-2021-united-nations-program-budget/) the entire U.N. budget for 2021 because it contained funding for the Durban reprise and the concomitant spread of anti-Semitism.

But times have evidently changed. In late February, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken addressed the current session of the U.N. Human Rights Council and [announced](https://geneva.usmission.gov/2021/02/24/secretary-hrc/) that the Biden administration intends to join the council, notwithstanding the body’s entrenched anti-Israel and anti-Jewish bias. The election of the United States, to occur in the fall, will lend legitimacy to a U.N. “human rights” authority whose members include the likes of China, Cuba, Libya, Russia, Somalia and Venezuela.

A political desire to impress evidently overcame hitherto American antipathy to Durban. At the same council session on March 19, the U.S. representative delivered a [statement](https://geneva.usmission.gov/2021/03/19/joint-statement-on-racism/) on the subject of racism, boasting the support of “more than 150 states.” The statement spoke of “recalling the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action” as part of an international commitment “to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.” It’s a commitment that singles out Israel and paints a Jewish state as a racist state.

Obviously, Israel couldn’t sign on to a form of political suicide. And just as obviously, the Biden administration didn’t care. It did care, however, about garnering the signatures of repressive, intolerant, xenophobic regimes.

Happily signing the Biden-Blinken initiative were the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Turkey and Zimbabwe. As did Pakistan, where in January, the Supreme Court [ordered](https://www.reuters.com/article/pakistan-usa-danielpearl-int/pakistan-court-orders-release-from-prison-of-mastermind-in-daniel-pearl-case-idUSKBN2A20TI) the acquittal of those involved in American journalist Daniel Pearl’s murder and their move from prison “to a comfortable residential environment.” Pearl’s last words before being beheaded were: “My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish.”

Prior to Biden and Blinken, no American administration would have paired a call to combat racism with “recalling the Durban Declaration” or marking a Durban “anniversary.” Instead, the United States has steadfastly called on states to look forward and combat racism in other ways because Durban wrongly turns the fight against racism into a fight against Jews.

The Biden administration must now decide whether or not to attend Durban IV. They know that it will definitely end in a call for the Durban Declaration’s “full implementation” in accordance with the General Assembly demand. That an “explanation of vote” or “disassociating” from an occasional paragraph will be buried, and that the headline will be American approval.

Even former President Barack Obama ensured that the United States boycotted Durban II and III, and refused to commemorate the 10th anniversary. The 20th anniversary is the anti-Semite’s long game. America’s long game, however, ought to be to stand against anti-Semitism, regardless of whether discriminating against Jews in the name of equality is a bargain that others are prepared to make.

In view of Friday’s move, Durban IV needs to be publicly shunned immediately—not recalled, reaffirmed, celebrated, commemorated or fully implemented. Combating racism and xenophobia necessitates staying away.