French Jewish leader justifies Durban participation

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The head of France’s largest Jewish umbrella group justified his country’s participation in the Durban II conference.

CRIF President Richard Prasquier, telling JTA he “understood” why France attended the conference, explained that it was in order to “fight” for a fairer final document.

Compared to earlier versions of the document finally adopted April 21 by the U.N. forum in Geneva, the text is a “huge success,” he told JTA by phone on Friday.

The French daily Le Monde also praised the U.N.-sponsored conference results in an April 25 story titled “Durban II was saved.”

The forum’s final text omitted any direct mention of Israel but remains controversial because it approved the 2001 Durban document, which described the Palestinians as "victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance." The United States, among other countries, boycotted the conference because of the item.

Like other Jewish groups, the CRIF organization spent months preparing against a repeat of the original anti-Israel Durban conference, and Prasquier still insists the U.N. forum is inherently “a moral shame.”

Prasquier said the approved text, and the fact that European delegates left the room during Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s anti-Israel speech at the beginning of the forum, could help “modify” the conference in the future.

The “spectacular” walkout by European delegates shows that “the human rights conference has been kidnapped,” he said.

“We shouldn’t make much of a difference between those countries who boycotted the conference and those who protested” during Ahmadinejad’s speech, concluded Prasquier.