# **General Assembly Votes to Commemorate Durban Conf.**

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The US and Israel expressed dismay on Wednesday at a vote by the UN General Assembly to commemorate the Durban anti-racism conference of 2001 at next year’s GA meeting in New York.  
  
Late on Tuesday night, the motion passed 121 to 19, with 35 countries abstaining.

Israeli officials voiced concern that next year’s conference would become a forum for anti-Israel bashing, just as the original one had.  
  
Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor responded to the vote by saying that it was “unfortunate there are those who want to deflect from the fight on racism for anti-Israeli propaganda purposes.”  
  
By so doing, they were “harming the real struggle” against racism, he said.  
  
Palmor noted that most of the world’s democratic countries had either voted against the resolution or abstained.  
  
Officially known as the World Conference against Racism 2001, Durban I was marred by dramatic displays of anti-Semitism and attacks on Israel’s right to exist. Last year’s Durban II showcased Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s tirades against Israel, as well as his denial of the Holocaust.  
  
Among those voting against the intended commemoration were Israel, the United States, Italy, Australia, Germany, Canada, Sweden, the Netherlands, Poland and Romania.  
  
The US, in a statement by Deputy Representative to the UN’s Economic and Social Council John Sammis, expressed its disapproval of the commemoration in an accompanying explanation of its vote.  
  
“My delegation regrets that this resolution contains elements that require us to vote no, and we hope to work together to find common ground on concrete approaches that both protect freedom of expression and combat all forms of racism and racial discrimination,” Sammis said, adding that the US was “deeply troubled by the choice of time and venue for the 10th anniversary commemorative event.  
  
“Just days earlier, we will have honored the victims of 9/11, whose loved ones will be marking a solemn 10-year anniversary for them and the entire nation,” Sammis said.  
  
“It will be an especially sensitive time for the people of New York, and a repeat of the vitriol sadly experienced at past Durban-related events risks undermining the relationship we have worked hard to strengthen over the past few years between the United States and the UN.”  
  
Fiamma Nirenstein, a former journalist and now vice president of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, this week recalled covering the initial Durban conference.  
  
“Those were just the days before the attack on the Twin Towers and never was a hate scenario better laid,” Nirenstein wrote. “Durban was the premise to Ground Zero.  
  
While from the podium speakers heaped on the US and Israel all the sins of the world and demanded that they pay the penalty, Jews wearing kippahs had to protect themselves against the demonstrators touting portraits of [Osama] bin Laden (which at the time I saw and reported on) and hounding the Jews.”  
  
Recalling that Jewish centers in Durban had been stormed and closed, and that an Israeli press conference had been violently interrupted, Nirenstein wrote that Israel had been compared to Nazism and accused of apartheid at Durban, while it was demanded that Americans “handsomely recompense Africa for damages from slavery.  
  
“The Durban declaration that they now want to resurrect and celebrate again singles out Israel as a racist state, without naming any other country in the world.  
  
The myriad types of ethnic and religious discrimination that infest the world, for the declaration, does not exist and it doesn’t even say a word about the thousands of massacres that have bloodied the globe for reasons of the color of one’s skin or beliefs,” Nirenstein wrote.  
  
“Re-approving the Durban document means rekindling, with the elephantine power of the UN General Assembly, a whole series of institutional initiatives giving rise to cultural and economic boycotts, discrimination against athletes, artists and scholars and proliferating the accusations of war crimes to any Israeli official in sight,” Nirenstein said.  
  
“It means reviving manifestations of hate in which the swastika and the Star of David overlap and the hunting season on Jews is declared open, the result being an exponential growth in anti-Semitic incidents. This makes many people happy, very happy.”  
  
The Anti-Defamation League, meanwhile, called the UN resolution to commemorate the conference “outrageous and shameful.”  
  
“Each commemoration or review of the 2001 conference is an outrageous and shameful reminder of the harm which was perpetrated by an automatic majority of member states who allowed the Durban conference to become the symbol for expressions of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel hate,” ADL national director Abe Foxman said.  
  
“We appreciate the vote by the United States and the 18 other countries who took a moral stand in opposition to the resolution and truly wish that more countries would have joined them,” he said.