

Statement by

**Ambassador Willem Udenhout
Special Envoy of the President of the Republic
of Suriname to the World Conference Against
Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia
and Related intolerance, Durban, Republic of
South Africa**

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Madam President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I congratulate Minister Zuma on her election as President of this conference. My delegation also wishes to join all those who have expressed appreciation to the government of South Africa for hosting this third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. We wish to express our profound gratitude to the people of South Africa for their warm hospitality. At the same time my delegation extends heartfelt condolences to President Mbeki and his family, and the people of South Africa on the recent demise of Mr. Govan Mbeki, who was a source of great inspiration for the struggle against Apartheid.

Mr. Chairman, during the few minutes allotted to us , my delegation wants to state our position with respect to two aspects of the themes of this conference which are of particular relevance to us.

Mr, Chairman, basic truths and basic convictions can always be expressed in few and simple words. Of all the forms of racism that humanity has known, the transatlantic slave trade and slavery was the most horrible and most depraved. It was unique in scope and nature, and in its damage to the psyche of its victims; and it was a crime that was sustained for more than three centuries. My delegation wishes to state, unequivocally, that the Republic of Suriname considers the transatlantic slave trade and slavery a crime against humanity. If the systematic and most abhorrent forms of dehumanisation does not constitute a crime against humanity, then, what does?

Mr. Chairman

It is a matter of serious concern to my delegation that there are those who believe that the so-called remoteness of the crime and

the fact that it was legalized would make it impossible for the world community to condemn it today. In the view of my delegation the legalization makes it even more atrocious; and it is not disputed that slavery is the root cause of many of today's evils.

So, in the most meaningful sense, slavery is not contained in the past; it has proliferated in many forms, and is entrenched in the fabrics of our societies, shaping minds and determining destinies. We must commend the Inter-American Development Bank for providing the data to this conference which show the link between racism, poverty and inequality; between racism, being undereducated, underpaid and underemployed.

Therefore, failure of the world community to unite at this conference in its condemnation of the most heinous form of racism will seriously disturb the basis of the international solidarity that is required to achieve the peace and stability that we desperately need and which continue to elude us.

My delegation is therefore convinced that reparation and compensatory measures are indispensable for acknowledging for past wrongs, for the healing process that will accelerate the process of inclusion of the most marginalized groups. The ways and means of these measures should be negotiable. The basic principle here should be understood as measures that will strengthen the development capabilities of affected countries and affected groups.

Ideas have been advanced during this conference and they must be studied as possible options. Existing arrangements between some affected countries and former colonial powers can be studied, improved and expanded as sound bases for feasible development programmes.

At the same time, funds should be made available in every country for education and awareness programmes to deal with

the most persistent forms of racial discriminations and xenophobia.

Mr. Chairman, Suriname is described as one of the most culturally diverse countries of the Western Hemisphere. Of course no one can dispute the observations made by many delegations that no country has so far escaped the evils covered by the themes of this conference, and as a society created by the experience of colonialism, slavery and the system of indentureship, we are still struggling to define our sense of nationhood. But we have been remarkably successful in the management of ethnic diversity, and Suriname's level of racial harmony is hardly matched anywhere else in the world. Ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity are not just a matter of tolerance with the people of Suriname; they are a matter of celebration.

Mr. Chairman, Suriname is ready to share our experience and use it as a basis for a meaningful contribution to the world community in the struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Thank you.