

# RACISM

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA, AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

**IPATC**  
INSTITUTE FOR PAN-AFRICAN  
THOUGHT AND CONVERSATION



## **Ending Global Apartheid: 20th Anniversary Commemoration of the Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance**

Johannesburg, South Africa

Date of publication: August 2021

Rapporteur: Dr Adeoye O. Akinola, Head of Research and Teaching,  
Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC),  
University of Johannesburg (UJ)

Editors: Prof Adekeye Adebajo, Director, IPATC, UJ; and  
Ms Glenda Young, Independent Consultant

5 MOLESEY AVENUE, AUCLAND PARK 2092, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA  
TEL: +27 11 559 7230 ■ FAX: +27 865 527 6448 ■ WEBSITE: <http://ipatc.joburg/>

## 1. Introduction

Between 31 August and 8 September 2001, the world converged at the International Conference Centre (ICC) in South Africa's port city of Durban, for the United Nations (UN) "World Conference Against Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance". The summit attracted 2,300 delegates from 163 countries, 4,000 civil society actors, and 1,100 media practitioners. The 2001 Durban Conference aimed to combat the legacies of slavery, imperialism, and colonialism, and to engage on diverse historical issues that confronted Africans, and their diaspora, those of Asian descent, and other indigenous peoples.

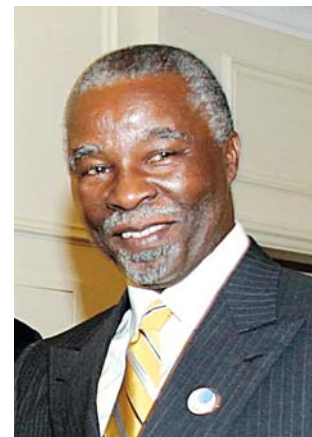
The meeting was hosted by then South African president Thabo Mbeki. More than any other contemporary African leader, Mbeki had a deep engagement with the Black World. As a young student, he had imbibed the activism of Martin Luther King Jr., the scholarship of Frantz Fanon, and the poetry of Langston Hughes. As president, he preached black solidarity from Atlanta, to Bahia, to Havana, to Haiti. In a stirring opening speech in Durban in 2001, Mbeki championed cultural equality and unequivocally condemned racism, noting: "We meet here because we are determined to ensure that nobody anywhere should be subjected to the insult and offence of being despised by another or others because of his or her race, colour, nationality or origin....there are many in our common world who suffer indignity and humiliation because they are not white. Their cultures and traditions are despised as savage and primitive and their identities denied."

To reflect on the impact of, and fight against, racism, xenophobia, and related intolerance, the University of Johannesburg's (UJ) Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) in South Africa, in collaboration with South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), organised a webinar on 30 July 2021 under the theme "20th Commemoration of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (Durban+20): Reflections on Youth and Racism Twenty Years Later". The meeting also commemorated the 45th anniversary of the 1976 Soweto uprising, and sought to reignite in the minds of young people, the spirit of the "Mandela-Robinson Pledge". In order to achieve greater policy impact, the webinar laid a foundation for the UN General Assembly debate on "Reparations, Racial Justice, and Equality for People of African Descent", in New York in September 2021.

Dr Naledi Pandor, South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation; Ms Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms Tendayi Achiume, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism; Ms Abigail Noko, Regional Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms Malaika Mahlatsi, an activist with the Pen and Azanian Revolution; and Professor Adekeye Adebajo, Director of UJ's IPATC, spoke at the event.

This report, produced solely by IPATC, is based on key discussions and policy recommendations that emerged from the meeting, as well as additional research.

“ We meet here because we are determined to ensure that nobody anywhere should be subjected to the insult and offence of being despised by another or others because of his or her race, colour, nationality or origin... ”



FORMER SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT, THABO MBEKI, HOSTED THE UN WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA, AND RELATED INTOLERANCE IN 2001.

IMAGE SOURCE - Wikipedia  
LINK - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thabo\\_Mbeki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thabo_Mbeki)

## 2. The Key Outcomes of the 2001 Durban World Conference

Prior to the 2001 Durban summit, other UN-led conventions had attempted to fight discrimination. While the 1960 UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples contributed to the political independence of many African countries, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993, called for the speedy and comprehensive elimination of all forms of racism and related intolerance, as did the two World Conferences to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, convened in Geneva, in 1978 and 1983.

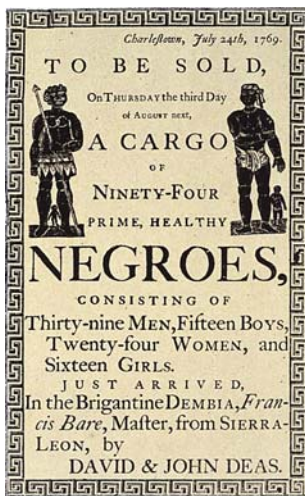
“ The transatlantic slave trade saw European slaving nations exporting 12-15 million African slaves to the Caribbean and the Americas between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. ”

The transatlantic slave trade saw European slaving nations – Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark – exporting 12-15 million African slaves to the Caribbean and the Americas between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. European colonial powers effectively set the rules for the partition of Africa at the notorious Berlin Conference in 1884/1885. Africans on the continent and in the diaspora have thus been victims of racial discrimination for over five centuries. They continue to experience social discrimination in both public institutions and private domains.

South Africa’s foreign minister, Naledi Pandor, noted that Durban represented, not only the cumulative effect of global struggles against racism and other contemporary forms of discrimination, but also underscored the prevailing optimism of the epoch. As stipulated in the 2001 Declaration, “slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity due to its abhorrent barbarism.” The slave trade had enhanced the expansion of global capitalism, which greatly contributed to the industrialisation of the West and the under-development of Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Furthermore, Durban bemoaned the plight of Palestinians, and acknowledged their right to an independent state. The Conference condemned the resurgence of neo-Fascist ideologies and the ubiquitous negative stereotyping of indigenous and marginalised groups in the Western media, thus anticipating the continued rise of Islamophobic European parties that demonised black and brown migrants. An important achievement in Durban was to declare slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and genocide as international crimes against humanity. Racism was identified as among the root causes of conflicts. National action plans and stronger legislation against intolerance were advocated.

However, many of the Conference’s recommendations were quixotic, with little chance of implementation due to the international economic and geopolitical system of “global apartheid” that keeps the global South marginalised. More concrete were Durban’s calls for education, research, and awareness-raising initiatives to tackle racism and xenophobia, including calls for religious groups and civil society actors to help fight the twin scourges. The 2021 Durban Declaration also pushed for the inclusion of the history and contributions of Africans into educational curricula, as well as fully integrating into public services, and increasing social services to, “communities of primarily African descent:” particularly sensitive issues for Brazil and the United States (US).



REPRODUCTION OF A HANDBILL ADVERTISING A SLAVE AUCTION IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, UNITED STATES, IN 1769.

IMAGE SOURCE - Wikipedia  
LINK - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic\\_slave\\_trade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_slave_trade)

### 3. Durban+20 and the “Mandela–Robinson Pledge”

The commemoration of the Durban Conference Declaration comes at an important moment in the struggle for racial justice at the national and global levels. South African foreign minister, Naledi Pandor, noted that the victory of the anti-apartheid movement between 1948 and 1994, which was supported by much of the international community, demonstrated that victory over the scourge of racism is possible whenever the comity of nations is united in its determination to say: “No to Racism”. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Michelle Bachelet, acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated many forms of discrimination – racial and xenophobic – which have exposed global inequalities and exacerbated the disproportionate impact of these disparities on the poor, as well as demonstrated the painful urgency of achieving equality in every aspect of society, the economy, and legal frameworks.

The July 2021 webinar further recognised the important contribution of former South African president, Nelson Mandela, and Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who, in the “Mandela–Robinson Pledge” on “Tolerance and Diversity: A Vision for the 21st Century”, enjoined delegates at the 2001 Durban Conference to create a world “where the exercise of individual gifts and personal rights is affirmed by the dynamic solidarity of our membership of one human family.” Drawing from the Mandela–Robinson vision, Naledi Pandor stressed the inherent potential of humanity to triumph over evil and barbarism. For its part, the UN noted that since the 2001 Durban summit, 42 of its member states have adopted or amended legislation prohibiting racial discrimination; 35 have established equality bodies for combatting racial discrimination and promoting equality; while 182 have ratified the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.



“ The *Mandela–Robinson Pledge on Tolerance and Diversity: A Vision for the 21st Century* enjoined delegates at the 2001 Durban Conference to create a world *where the exercise of individual gifts and personal rights is affirmed by the dynamic solidarity of our membership of one human family.* ”

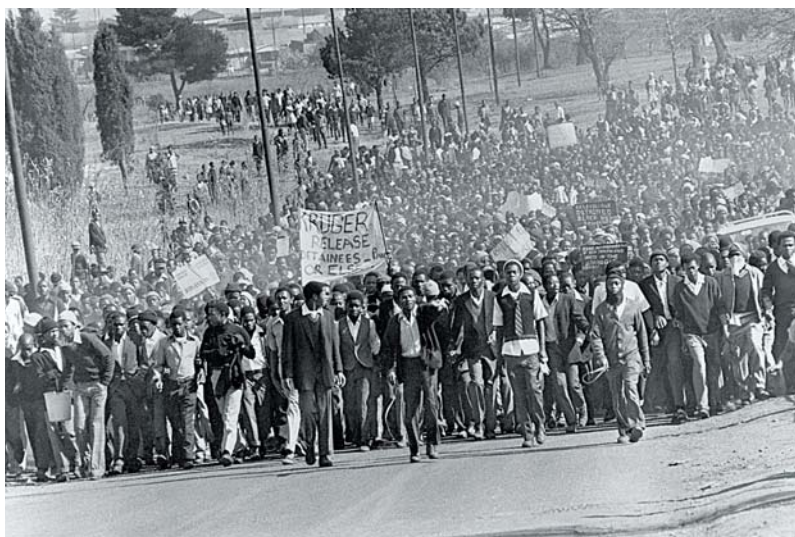
MARY ROBINSON, (LEFT), THE FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT OF IRELAND; AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA, NELSON MANDELA (RIGHT).

IMAGE SOURCES - Spear's and Wallpaper Safari  
LINKS - <https://www.spearswms.com/mary-robinson-climate-change/>  
<https://wallpapersafari.com/w/BrqjHL>

### 4. Youth and Reparations

The Durban+20 webinar in July 2021 recognised the place of the June 1976 Soweto uprising which claimed the lives of 176 black youth in confronting racism, as well as the giant strides made by young people in resisting contemporary manifestations of discrimination around the globe. Across Africa, technology-wielding youths have challenged, and in some cases, toppled regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Sudan, and Nigeria. Durban called for the youth – 60 percent of Africa’s population – to be centrally involved in the implementation of its programme of action. From the 2015 #RhodesMustFall student movements in South Africa that spread across the globe, to the 2013 and 2020 “#BlackLivesMatter” protests, youth and subaltern elements who are often forced to endure systematic marginalisation and discrimination, have taken to the streets across Africa, the US, and Europe to resist racial discrimination and to demand change.

While several Caribbean delegates at the 2001 Durban summit had expected African leaders such as South Africa's Thabo Mbeki, Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo, and Senegal's Abdoulaye Wade to have staunchly confronted major Western powers who had threatened to withdraw from the meeting in protest against any discourse on reparations, African representatives were more pragmatic in accepting political compromises in order to secure an outcome document. One of the Caribbean delegates, historian, Professor Hilary Beckles, later criticised African leaders, for having betrayed the Black race and for weakening Pan-Africanism by allowing Western governments to ignore the cause of reparations and to exclude stronger clauses in the final conference resolution condemning the transatlantic slave trade. However, there were nine days of arduous negotiations in which the withdrawal of the American and Israeli delegations – as a result of perceived anti-Israel bias – nearly scuttled the summit. Japan and India were also vigorously resisting any references to discriminatory caste systems. Only with political concessions, was the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action agreed among the 161 remaining delegates.



“ The Durban+20 webinar recognised the place of the June 1976 Soweto uprising which claimed the lives of 176 black youth in confronting racism. ”

BLACK STUDENTS IN SOWETO PROTESTING IN 1976 AGAINST HAVING TO USE AFRIKAANS AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS.

IMAGE SOURCE - Wikipedia  
PHOTO CREDIT - AFP  
LINK - <https://www.enca.com/news/1976-struggle-hero-dan-sechaba-montsitsi-dies>

## 5. The September 2021 UN General Assembly Summit and the Global Quest for Reparations

As the calls for reparations gain more momentum, attention is fixed on the UN General Assembly debate on the post-Durban conference in New York in September 2021. The 2001 Durban meeting had laid a solid foundation for making a legitimate case for reparations. Reparations represent an act of public atonement by providing payment or other assistance to those who have been afflicted by injustices such as slavery, imperial wars, colonialism, and genocide. Indeed, the call for reparations is tied to political and restorative justice that demands that a debt be paid to the descendants of African slaves, as well as to countries and people who have suffered similar dehumanisation such as indigenous people in the Americas, Australia, and Canada.

Despite the legitimacy involved in these claims, the reparations movement has, however, been received with scepticism and, in some quarters, derision and denialism over the injustices of slavery, imperialism, and colonialism. Among the criticisms is that while Europe and America benefited immensely from slave labour, reparations advocates should not attribute guilt to these Western powers and expect them to atone for the actions of their ancestors, since slavery had been abolished by the West in 1888. This argument is often bolstered by the view that the slavers and slaves are deceased. In particular, Britain's central role in chattel slavery is often overshadowed by the narrative of the nation's involvement in the abolitionist movement. However, when London outlawed the slave trade across its empire in 1833, it paid slave owners the contemporary equivalent of £200 billion in compensation. No compensation was ever paid to those who had been enslaved and their descendants.

**Ending Global Apartheid:  
20th Anniversary Commemoration of the Durban World Conference against  
Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance**

The Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) Eminent Persons Group on Reparations of 1992-1993 demanded that the West recognise and pay compensation to Africa and its diaspora for the twin crimes of slavery and colonialism. The need for reparations and the contributions of the slave trade to the West's industrialisation have ironically often been neglected by African leaders and scholars.

Barbadian historian, Hilary Beckles, has led the reparations debate in the Caribbean, noting how slavery and genocide continue to be a negative part of the lived experiences of people in the region despite the declaration of emancipation nearly two centuries ago. Modern ailments common among Caribbean citizens like diabetes and hypertension can be traced directly to the era of European slavery and colonialism. Beckles has thus argued for the British state, its banks, merchant houses, insurance companies and the Church of England to pay compensation to the descendants of victims of these crimes against humanity. A 2004 estimate of the cost of the slave trade to the Caribbean arrived at a figure of £7.5 trillion. In response, in August 2019, Scotland's Glasgow University agreed to raise £20 million to establish a joint Centre for Development Research at the University of the West Indies (UWI) to start to atone for having benefitted from Scottish slave traders in the Caribbean. In May 2021, Germany apologised to the Namibian people for the genocide which killed an estimated 80 per cent of indigenous Herero and Nama people between 1904-1908. Berlin further offered \$1.3 billion in compensation to support Namibia's development efforts over the next 30 years.

As the 400th anniversary of American slavery was commemorated in 2019, the thorny issue of reparations for descendants of this exploitative system of enforced servitude and uncompensated labour was once more debated. Democrats in the US Congress have now embraced the cause of reparations. Universities like Harvard, Yale, and Brown which benefitted from slavery, have established programmes of restitution. Reparations continue to be demanded in order to close the 400-year gap between white and black Americans, which is still evident in the structural impediments that African Americans continue to experience, including the lack of access to healthcare and other critical social services, that the recent COVID-19 pandemic glaringly exposed.

The pandemic has disproportionately affected blacks in the US. Despite accounting for only 13.8 per cent of the population, black Americans are being hospitalised at rates 2.9 times higher than white Americans, and dying from COVID-19 at rates 1.9 times higher. By July 2021, of the 57 per cent of Americans who had received COVID vaccinations, about 60 per cent were white, and just 9 per cent black. These infection, death, and vaccine rates are a stark reminder of the inequalities that still persist as a result of the weak socio-economic and political position of African Americans, transcending the slavery and post-slavery epochs. The 2001 Durban declaration thus made clear that all forms of discrimination can be aggravated by an inequitable distribution of wealth, marginalization, and social exclusion.



“ The 2001 Durban declaration made it clear that all forms of discrimination can be aggravated by an inequitable distribution of wealth, marginalization, and social exclusion. ”

GHANA'S KOFI ANNAN, THEN SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UN, ADDRESSES DELEGATES DURING THE OPENING SESSION OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM IN DURBAN IN 2001.

IMAGE SOURCE - Jewish News  
LINK - <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/uk-set-to-confirm-boycott-of-durban-iv-conference-amid-antisemitism-concerns/>

## 6. Policy Recommendations

The following five key policy recommendations emerged from the 20th Commemoration of the World Conference webinar in July 2021:

1. First, the call for reparations represents an atonement and restitution for the crimes of human misery committed by European slaving and/or imperialism in Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas, and Asia. Thus, the UN has a major responsibility to insist on reparations as the most effective instrument for achieving political and restorative justice.
2. Second, all governments must muster the political will and commitment to eradicate all forms of racism, xenophobia, and contemporary intolerance at the national, regional, and global levels.
3. Third, concerted institutional efforts directed at racism should be extended to the fight against xenophobia and the marginalization of vulnerable groups.
4. Fourth, the youth must be actively involved in the quest to combat all forms of discrimination around the globe. All governments must use education as a tool to expose young people to basic information that is required to co-exist peacefully with others in mutual respect.
5. Fifth, through collaboration with non-state actors, governments around the world are strongly encouraged to dismantle socio-economic and political structures that continue to reinforce racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance.



“ The UN has a major responsibility to insist on reparations as the most effective instrument for achieving political and restorative justice. ”

A PANEL AT THE WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA, IN 2001.

IMAGE SOURCE - Jewish NewsSyndicate

PHOTO CREDIT - U.N./Ron da Silva

LINK - <https://www.jns.org/us-takes-principled-decision-in-skipping-anti-semitic-durban-conference/>