

[Key address by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Durban, South Africa. September 1, 2001 \[1\]](#)

Date:

01/09/2001

Excellencies:

Delegates and guests:

Racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia are not naturally instinctive reactions of the human beings but rather a social, cultural and political phenomenon born directly of wars, military conquests, slavery and the individual or collective exploitation of the weakest by the most powerful all along the history of human societies.

No one has the right to boycott this Conference which tries to bring some sort of relief to the overwhelming majority of mankind afflicted by unbearable suffering and enormous injustice. Neither has anyone the right to set preconditions to this conference or urge it to avoid the discussion of historical responsibility, fair compensation or the way we decide to rate the dreadful genocide perpetrated, at this very moment, against our Palestinian brothers by extreme right leaders who, in alliance with the hegemonic superpower, pretend to be acting on behalf of another people which throughout almost two thousand years was the victim of the most fierce persecution, discrimination and injustice that history has known.

Cuba speaks of reparations, and supports this idea as an unavoidable moral duty to the victims of racism, based on a major precedent, that is, the indemnification being paid to the descendants of the Hebrew people which in the very heart of Europe suffered the brutal and loathsome racist holocaust. However, it is not with the intent to undertake an impossible search for the direct descendants or the specific countries of the victims of actions occurred throughout centuries. The irrefutable truth is that tens of millions of Africans were captured, sold like a commodity and sent beyond the Atlantic to work in slavery while 70 million indigenous people in that hemisphere perished as a result of the European conquest and colonization.

The inhuman exploitation imposed on the peoples of three continents, including Asia, marked forever the destiny and lives of over 4.5 billion people living in the Third World today whose poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and health rates as well as their infant mortality, life expectancy and other calamities --too many, in fact, to enumerate here-- are certainly awesome and harrowing. They are the current victims of that atrocity which lasted centuries and the ones who clearly deserve compensation for the horrendous crimes perpetrated against their ancestors and peoples.

Actually, such a brutal exploitation did not end when many countries became independent, not even after the formal abolition of slavery. Right after independence, the main ideologists of the American Union that emerged when the 13 colonies got rid of the British domination at the end of the 18th century, advanced ideas and strategies unquestionably expansionist in nature.

It was based on such ideas that the ancient white settlers of European descent, in their march to the West, forcibly occupied the lands in which Native-Americans had lived for thousands of years thus exterminating millions of them in the process. But, they did not stop at the boundaries of the former Spanish possessions; consequently Mexico, a Latin American country that had attained its independence in 1821, was stripped off millions of square kilometers of territory and invaluable natural resources.

Meanwhile, in the increasingly powerful and expansionist nation born in North America, the obnoxious and inhumane slavery system stayed in place for almost a century after the famous Declaration of Independence of 1776 was issued, the same that proclaimed that all men were born free and equal.

After the purely formal slave emancipation, African-Americans were subjected during one hundred more years to the harshest racial discrimination, and many of its features and consequences still persist after almost four more decades of heroic struggles and the achievements of the 1960's, for which Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and other outstanding fighters gave their lives. Based on a purely racist rationale, the longest and most severe legal sentences are passed against African-Americans who in the wealthy American society are bound to live in dire poverty and with the lowest living standards.

Likewise, what is left of the Native-American peoples, which were the first to inhabit a large portion of the current territory of the United States of America, remain under even worse conditions of discrimination and neglect.

Needless to mention the data on the social and economic situation of Africa where entire countries and even whole regions of Sub-Saharan Africa are in risk of extinction the result of an extremely complex combination of economic backwardness, excruciating poverty and grave diseases, both old and new, that have become a true scourge. And the situation is no less dramatic in numerous Asian countries. On top of all this, there are the huge and unpayable debts, the disparate terms of trade, the ruinous prices of basic commodities, the demographic explosion, the neoliberal globalization and the climate changes that produce long draughts alternating with increasingly intensive rains and floods. It can be mathematically proven that such a predicament is unsustainable.

The developed countries and their consumer societies, presently responsible for the accelerated and almost unstoppable destruction of the environment, have been the main beneficiaries of the conquest and colonization, of slavery, of the ruthless exploitation and the extermination of hundreds of millions of people born in the countries that today constitute the Third World. They have also reaped the benefits of the economic order imposed on humanity after two atrocious and devastating wars for a new division of the world and its markets, of the privileges granted to the United States and its allies in Bretton-Woods, and of the IMF and the international financial institutions exclusively created by them and for them.

That rich and squandering world is in possession of the technical and financial resources necessary to pay what is due to mankind. The hegemonic superpower should also pay back its special debt to African-Americans, to Native-Americans living in reservations, and to the tens of millions of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants as well as others from poor nations, be they mulatto, yellow or black, but victims all of vicious discrimination and scorn.

It is high time to put an end to the dramatic situation of the indigenous communities in our hemisphere. Their own awakening and struggles, and the universal admission of the monstrosity of the crime committed against them make it imperative.

There are enough funds to save the world from the tragedy.

May the arms race and the weapon commerce that only bring devastation and death truly end.

Let it be used for development a good part of the one trillion US dollars annually spent on the

commercial advertising that creates false illusions and inaccessible consumer habits while releasing the venom that destroys the national cultures and identities.

May the modest 0.7 percentage point of the Gross National Product promised as official development assistance be finally delivered.

May the tax suggested by Nobel Prize Laureate James Tobin be imposed in a reasonable and effective way on the current speculative operations accounting for trillions of US dollars every 24 hours, then the United Nations, which cannot go on depending on meager, inadequate, and belated donations and charities, will have one trillion US dollars annually to save and develop the world. Mark my words! One trillion US dollars every year! There are no few people in the world who can add, subtract, divide and multiply. This is not an overstatement! Given the seriousness and urgency of the existing problems, which have become a real hazard for the very survival of our specie on the planet, that is what would actually be needed before it is too late.

Put and end to the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people that is taking place while the world stares in amazement. May the basic right to life of that people, children and youth, be protected. May their right to peace and independence be respected; then, there will be nothing to fear from UN documents.

I am aware that the need for some relief from the awful situation their countries are facing has led many friends from Africa and other regions to suggest the need for such prudence as would allow something to come out of this conference. I sympathize with them but I cannot renounce my convictions, as I feel that the more candid we are in telling the truth the more possibilities there will be to be heeded and respected. There have been enough centuries of deception.

I have only three other short questions based on realities that cannot be ignored.

The capitalist, developed and wealthy countries today participate of the imperialist system born of capitalism itself and the economic order imposed to the world based on the philosophy of selfishness and the brutal competition between men, nations and groups of nations which in completely indifferent to any feelings of solidarity and honest international cooperation. They live under the misleading, irresponsible and hallucinating atmosphere of consumer societies. Thus, regardless the sincerity of their blind faith in such a system and the convictions of their most serious statesmen, I wonder: Will they be able to understand the grave problems of today's world which in its incoherent and uneven development is ruled by blind laws, by the huge power and the interests of the ever growing and increasingly uncontrollable and independent transnational corporations?

Will they come to understand the impending universal chaos and rebellion? And, even if they wanted to, could they put an end to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other related issues, which are precisely the rest of them all?

From my viewpoint we are on the verge of a huge economic, social and political global crisis. Let's try to build an awareness about these realities and the alternatives will come up. History has shown that it is only from deep crisis that great solutions have emerged. The peoples' right to life and justice will definitely impose itself under a thousand different shapes.

I believe in the mobilization and the struggle of the peoples! I believe in the idea of justice! I believe in truth! I believe in man!

Thank you.

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