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World Conference Against Racism Ends: Successes must not be over shadowed by disputes

Durban, South Africa: Despite serious problems and disputes which have marred the event, the World Conference Against Racism has achieved some important successes, Amnesty International said on the last day of the Conference.

For the first time, the plight of groups such as Dalits, Roma, Tibetans, indigenous people, those who face multiple forms of discrimination, such as refugees, women or gays and lesbians, and those living under occupation, has been put forcefully on the world agenda.

“The debates at the conference have shown the extent to which governments are failing in their responsibility to deal with human rights crises that generate much anger and frustration,” said Claudio Cordone, coordinator of Amnesty International’s delegation in Durban.

“What we have heard from the victims of racism is essentially a cry for help. We should not turn away because we may not like how it sounds, no matter how unpleasant. Governments have a duty to listen and to act, and to do so with a renewed sense of urgency.”

“Despite disagreements and walk-outs, governments are still bound by their international obligations to take effective action against racism,” Cordone said.

Amnesty International and other non-governmental organizations will campaign to ensure that governments do not forget what has been

demonstrated so passionately in Durban. The level and extent of racism has never been clearer and the conference has succeeded in establishing the beginnings of a global alliance against racism.

Concrete action that will make a real difference in peoples' lives must supersede a preoccupation with language and political interests.

Amnesty International is calling on all governments to implement national action plans to combat racism and to include specific measures relating to the administration of justice.

Contrary to some media reports, Amnesty International did not walk out of the NGO Forum, remaining at the conference throughout. Although not accepting or condoning some of the language used within the NGO Declaration, Amnesty International accepts the declaration as a largely positive document which gives a voice to all the victims of racism wherever it occurs, including those seldom heard such as Dalits and refugees.

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