

Ahmadinejad speech provokes walkout at UN anti-racism conference

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Hysterical denunciations by the US, Israel and the European powers of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's speech to the UN's anti-racism review conference on Monday in Geneva were entirely predictable and part of a highly-orchestrated campaign against the event. After boycotting the first UN anti-racism conference in 2001, Israel has been agitating against the recall meeting in Geneva, determined to stamp out any criticism within UN circles of its ongoing repression of the Palestinian people.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced the Geneva conference as "anti-Israel" and withdrew Israel's ambassador from Switzerland in protest over a meeting between the Swiss president and Ahmadinejad before the conference. Other Israeli politicians compared the Iranian president with Hitler and attacked the UN for inviting him. The UN had extended an invitation to the government heads of all its member states to attend and speak, but Ahmadinejad was the only one to accept.

In the lead-up to the conference, UN officials modified the draft conference resolution, removing all references to Israel and Zionism in a concerted attempt to persuade the US and other countries to participate. UN officials also banned all side events on Israel or Palestine from the official program. At the same time, anti-racism NGOs appealed to US President Obama to endorse American participation suggesting that it would be an important public relations exercise for the first black US president.

This was all to no avail. Obama declared on April 19 that the draft declaration contained "objectionable provisions" that "could be used to express antagonism" toward Israel and announced the US boycott the event. Following suit were Canada, Italy, Germany, the

Netherlands, Poland and the US Pacific allies, Australia and New Zealand.

In the event, Ahmadinejad's speech on Monday, which had apparently been toned down after a discussion with UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon, was unremarkable.

The Iranian president restated previous comments about the origins of the Zionist state and its dispossession of the Palestinian people, declaring in part: "After the Second World War, by exploiting the holocaust and under the pretext of protecting the Jews, they [the Zionists] made a nation homeless with military expeditions and invasion. They transferred various groups of people from America, Europe and other countries to this land. They established a completely racist government in the occupied Palestinian territories. And in fact, under the pretext of making up for damages resulting from racism in Europe, they established the most aggressive, racist country in another territory, i.e., Palestine. The Security Council endorsed this usurper regime and for 60 years constantly defended it and let it commit any kind of crime."

Ahmadinejad went on to criticise the US invasion of Iraq, which he said was carried out to "loot" that country's energy resources. Referring to the American and European occupation of Afghanistan he asked: "Did peace, security and prosperity return to Afghanistan by military intervention? America and its allies were not even able to stop the production of narcotics and during their presence it increased several fold."

The speech was subjected to constant jeering in the public gallery. Two pro-Zionist student protestors wearing clown wigs attempted to drown out the speech, while 23 of the 27 European representatives walked out as soon as the Iranian president mentioned Israel.

Alejandro Wolff, US deputy ambassador to the UN, later declared that the Iranian president's remarks

were “vile, hateful, inciteful” and the Czech government, current holder of the EU presidency, announced that it had decided to boycott the conference following the speech.

No political credence can be given to the political posturing of Ahmadinejad. He heads a repressive anti-democratic Islamic regime and has, at times, deliberately stirred up anti-Semitic sentiment by questioning whether the Holocaust occurred. But that his brief mention of the historical origins of Israel and the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people produced such a response indicates the depth of political tensions in the Middle East. Neither Israel nor its US sponsor will allow any public discussion or debate on these issues.

Notwithstanding Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric, his comments were not animated by any genuine concern for the Palestinian people, nor will the Iranian government conduct any genuine struggle against Zionism and its imperialist backers.

Ahmadinejad faces national elections in June and with falling oil prices and growing unemployment his speech was primarily aimed at an Iranian domestic audience. He is also acutely aware that the deep-seated hostility among the Arab masses over collaboration between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern governments has provided him with an opportunity to posture within the region as a representative of the masses.

At the same time, Ahmadinejad and the Iranian bourgeoisie are manoeuvring to re-establish political relations with the Obama administration. Following his speech the Iranian president told the Swiss Chamber of Commerce that he appreciated moves by Washington to reestablish a dialogue with Iran: “We welcome US change of policy provided these changes are fundamental and essential. We do not expect deep-rooted problems dating back to 30 or 60 years ago to be resolved swiftly but the fact is that the move is going in its proper track.”

These overtures are of concern to Israel with the daily newspaper *Haaretz* reporting this week that the Israeli government is planning to allocate additional funds to intensify its campaign to discredit Iran in countries which are making tentative efforts to re-establish economic ties with Iran. It is widely known that the Zionist regime has made advanced preparations for a strike against Iran, which leading figures within the new government are determined to carry out sometime this year.

Like Ahmadinejad, those political leaders from the

Middle East, Africa and Asia who attended the UN conference used it as an opportunity to issue harmless anti-imperialist rhetoric in an attempt to deflect domestic political opposition from their own citizens. On April 21 the delegates passed a 143-point resolution pledging to combat racism, discrimination against minorities, stereotyping people on religious grounds (a key demand of Islamic states) and reaffirming principles agreed in 2001.

While UN officials proclaimed the new resolution a historic milestone, nothing that emerges from this gathering will change the situation facing the Palestinian people or the oppressed masses in the Middle East and elsewhere. The source of racism lies in the capitalist profit system itself—a system supported and defended by the UN itself and all the assembled delegates.

Within weeks of the Durban conference in 2001, the US government unleashed its so-called “war on terror”, invading Afghanistan and later Iraq, producing a quantum leap in state-sponsored “racism, xenophobia and related intolerance,” all sanctioned by the UN. This was followed in 2003 and 2006 by Israeli military incursions into Syria, the invasion of southern Lebanon in 2006 and in 2008-2009 a bloody assault on the residents of Gaza, in which more than 1,400 people were killed, most of them innocent women and children. Like Ahmadinejad’s demagogic references to Afghanistan and Iraq, the pronouncements of the UN anti-racism conference are nothing but a cover for its complicity in these crimes.



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