

United Nations must



By Navi Pillay

Countries and organisations should actively participate in Geneva this week to help create a more equitable world

ON taking office as the UN high commissioner for human rights, I was warned about the controversy surrounding the 2001 World Conference Against Racism that was held in Durban, and advised to distance myself from this year's Review Conference, which takes place in Geneva from 20 to 24 April.

I have taken the opposite approach. Here is why we need to make this Geneva meeting a success.

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Burundi and also drastically destabilised its gigantic neighbour, the Democratic Republic of Congo. The ripple effect, in the form of refugees and migrants, continues today, not just in Africa but in Europe and North America. We cannot close our eyes and hope similar hatreds simmering or being actively stirred up in

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other corners of the world will simply go away. They will not. We need to act.

The Holocaust, and more recently the wars in the Balkans and the Rwandan genocide, which began 15

years ago this month, show that epic forms of racist violence are an ever-present threat. And there are myriad examples of smaller-scale, but also grotesque, forms of hatred that are tolerated or ignored even though, day after day, they are blighting the lives of millions of people all over the world.

Islamophobia, antisemitism and Christianophobia - indeed hatred directed at members of any particular race or religion - are unacceptable. More than ever, we need to remain vigilant against hate speech, given that "new media" could be used to disseminate to millions propaganda that incites violence in a matter of seconds. We need to face these threats and many more, some of which can all too easily reach the point of undermining peace and security for entire countries and regions.

There is an element of extra urgency at present, since vulnerable groups tend to be particularly targeted in times of economic crisis, in both poor and rich countries.

t act on racism

I grew up under the apartheid regime in South Africa, which impressed upon us that black people were supposed to have smaller brains than white people. However, South Africa's extraordinary transformation in the 1990s shows that institutionalised discrimination can be defeated. Recent breakthroughs include

there is still much to do.

I am fully aware that the reputation of the 2001 World Conference was tainted by the antisemitic behaviour of some NGOs on the sidelines. Despite these deplorable events, the conference achieved its main objective, which was to devise the first ever global strategy

Review Conference. The framework set out in the DDPA has been instrumental in many countries in improving conditions for migrants, domestic workers, indigenous people, and victims of multiple discriminations. But implementation is far from complete, and this is where the Durban Review Conference comes in.

I know some have tried, as happened in 2001, to make the world's media focus on a single issue and some have called for a boycott of the Review Conference. But states and other participants must realise that the best way to deal with this and other forms of discrimination is to actively participate in the conference. Let us not get distracted from the main objective: to help create a world of equal opportunity and treatment for all of us, or at the very least for our children, and our children's children. **COURTESY THE GUARDIAN**

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the Australian and Canadian governments' apologies for past treatment of their indigenous populations. Despite these and other advances that have occurred since 2001,

to fight racism at the national, regional and international levels. This is enshrined in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), which forms the basis of this week's

The writer is UN high commissioner for human rights and secretary general of the Durban Review Conference