United Kingdom Explanation of Vote on a Resolution on the Durban Declaration and Program of Action at the U.N. General Assembly Third Committee

November 15, 2021

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Thank you, Chair.  There is no doubt that racism is a global scourge that knows no borders.  It is not limited to any one country.  We all have work to do to tackle racism.  That’s why the UK is fully committed to the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, as well as to the promotion and protection of human rights for all, without discrimination on any grounds.

At home, we will work to create a fair society where all people, regardless of ethnic origin or background, are valued and able to participate fully.  We will continue to support international mechanisms designed to tackle all forms of racism, including through important instruments such as the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

However, while we share the concern of this resolution’s cosponsors that we have a long way to go to fully realize our shared ambition of eradicating racism, we regret the cosponsors’ unwillingness to address well-known and long established concerns with the contents of this resolution.

Chair, we do not agree with the multiple references to the Durban Conference, given the overt antisemitism in and around the NGO Forum on the margins of the 2001 Conference and the abominable rhetoric seen at the 2009 Durban Review Conference.  We therefore cannot accept the references to the Durban Review Conference or the positive language welcoming the recent commemorative event in New York.

We believe this resolution serves as a vehicle to prolong the divisions caused by the original Durban Conference and its follow-up mechanisms, rather than providing a comprehensive and inclusive way forward for the international community to counter the scourge of racism and racial discrimination.

Mr. Chair, and fellow member states, the UK did not attend the recent 20th anniversary commemorative event for the Third World Conference Against Racism.  There were reports of nearly 40 states who, like us, made the decision not to take part.  We think we all need to ask ourselves why so many states stayed away and how we can move forward together.  If we are to be able to forge a consensus in the future, then it is clear that we must come together to find a new approach.  The importance of this topic requires that we move forward together on a common path.  Racism should be tackled in all its forms and regrettably, for far too long, the UN has downplayed the scourge of antisemitism.  This must end.

The UK is clear that we will not attend future iterations of the Durban Conference while concerns over antisemitism remain.  We have therefore voted against the draft text  Thank you, Mr. Chair.