Largest Belgian party calls on gov’t to boycott Durban conference

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Belgium’s opposition New Flemish Alliance Party (N-VA) has called on the country to boycott the UN event marking 20 years since the World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, which was stained with antisemitic and anti-Israel expressions.

Bart De Wever, chairman of the Flemish nationalist, conservative political party, the country’s largest, and N-VA MP Michael Freilich said Belgium should [join its neighbors](https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/france-to-boycott-durban-conference-over-antisemitism-concerns-676640) Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and France, as well as its allies the US, Canada and Australia, in boycotting Durban IV next month.

Those countries and more “have already indicated that they will not participate in this conference, which is for racism rather than against it,” Freilich said. “Belgium has thus become an island in our region in the midst of our neighboring countries.... What is this government waiting for?”

“Staying away is the only right decision,” de Wever said. “[We] must send a strong signal that we will not take it when the UN is being hijacked by extremist ideologies to propagate Jew-hatred.”

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo and Foreign Minister Sophie Wilmes plan to attend the UN General Assembly in September, Freilich said. Durban IV will take place on the sidelines of the GA.

The 2001 Durban Conference’s official declaration [singled out Israel](https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/why-durban-iv-must-be-boycotted-opinion-676592) as a perpetrator of racism, and its parallel NGO Forum is considered the inception point at which calling Israel apartheid became a popular accusation by activists. Participants in the forum disseminated the antisemitic canard The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and flyers saying the world would have been better if Hitler had succeeded.

Former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad denied the Holocaust at the first Durban Review Conference in 2009 and was invited to return in 2011, where he did the same.

A dozen countries announced they would boycott this year’s conference because of its history of antisemitism.

Belgium has a “left-wing, woke” government that “on the one hand is addressing sexism, racism and gender issues and on the other is giving antisemitism a blind eye,” Freilich said.

In June, Freilich asked Wilmes about the matter in a parliamentary question, but she did not respond.

Israeli Ambassador to Belgium Emmanuel Nahshon said he supported N-VA’s call.

“Since 2001, the Durban events are a total misuse of international platforms and are characterized by an abysmal hatred of the Jewish people and the State of Israel,” he said. “The world’s leading democracies have rightly decided not to participate in this shameful event, and I hope they will be joined by our friend Belgium.”

Coordination Committee of Jewish Associations of Belgium chairman Yohan Benizri said, “The urge to take part in this masquerade has become untenable.

“To make mistakes is human, but to persist in these mistakes is the work of the devil,” he said.

“Our country’s honor is at stake and its credibility in the fight against antisemitism has been severely damaged in recent years.”

The Belgian Jewish community has disputed the government’s decision to remove military guards from synagogues in Antwerp, which goes into effect this week. The guards were put in place after the 2014 terrorist attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels, in which a radical Islamist killed four people.