No Western state bid for speech, leading role at Durban

Declaration for anniversary conference does not roll back anti-Israel content; Romania joins boycott.

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No Western state has submitted candidacy for its leader to give a speech or lead a roundtable at Wednesday’s event marking the 20th anniversary of the [World Conference against Racism in Durban](https://www.jpost.com/podcast/does-the-durban-conference-matter-for-israel-679551), South Africa, which was marked with antisemitism and anti-Israel bias.

At the beginning of September, UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir asked each group of member states to put in a bid for a president or prime minister to address the opening ceremony of Durban IV, and to send a representative to lead a roundtable on the topic of people of African origin.

Andorran Deputy Permanent Representative at the UN Joan Josep Lopez informed Bozkir in a letter a week later, “We have not received yet any candidature at the level of Head of State or Head of Government and no expression of interest for the position of Chair of the two roundtables.”

The 28-state Western European and Others Group (WEOG) at the UN includes countries across Europe, as well as Turkey, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Israel. The US is an observer.

Israeli Ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan said the lack of interest from anyone in the Western group “means Israel succeeded in labeling the event antisemitic and anti-Israel.”

Romania joined the list of countries boycotting Durban IV over its antisemitism, bringing the number to 20. The countries skipping the event, all of which are WEOG members, are: Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Slovakia, Slovenia, the UK and the US. Belgium downgraded its attendance from the ministerial level to the diplomatic level.

Portugal, a member of WEOG, facilitated the intergovernmental negotiations, together with South Africa, on the declaration to be adopted at Durban IV this week.

The co-facilitators wrote in a letter to all representatives to the UN, “The text has been carefully drafted to balance the views of Member States’ expressed throughout the negotiation.”

The declaration focuses on combating “racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.”

It notes an increase in “racist violence, threats to violence, discrimination and stigmatization” against Asians in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, but does not mention the increase in pandemic-related antisemitism and distortion of the Holocaust.

It includes antisemitism among its examples of “prejudices against persons based on their religions or beliefs,” in a paragraph “acknowledg[ing] with deep concern the rise in discrimination, hate speech” and more.

However, it reaffirms the 2001 Durban Declaration, in which Israel is the only country singled out for opprobrium. The[Israel-Palestinian conflict](https://www.jpost.com/international/palestinians-make-anti-us-statement-on-durban-as-greece-slovenia-boycott-679452) is the only one specifically mentioned, and the declaration calls for a Palestinian state.

In addition, the 2001 Durban Conference was a hotbed of antisemitism, with accredited groups at its NGO forum distributing copies of the antisemitic canard The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and cartoons of hook-nosed Jews, and thousands marching against Israel, calling it an apartheid state.

Erdan said that while the latest draft does not specifically mention Israel, “it doesn’t matter; they say they accept the original Durban Declaration, so it is rotten to its core.”

The ambassador plans to participate in a virtual counter-conference on Sunday, organized by the Touro College Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust, along with the pro-Israel organization Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, or CAMERA.

Other speakers include former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo. Several speakers are black, including Likud MK Gadi Yevarkan, South African lawmaker Rev. Kenneth Meshoe and American historian Shelby Steele, pushing back against the anti-Israel message at Durban, which is meant to be a conference against racism with a special focus on people of African descent.