Peace and quiet outside of UN during controversial Durban conference

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A total of 34 countries openly boycotted Wednesday’s UN conference marking the 20th anniversary of the World Conference Against Racism in Durban because of the antisemitism and anti-Israel bias exhibited at the 2001 event.

But outside of the UN headquarters in midtown Manhattan on Wednesday morning, passersby would have no idea such a controversial event was taking place inside, if not for the road closures and heavy FBI and NYPD security personnel as dozens of world leaders convened in the city.

The bustling Turtle Bay streets were no louder than a typical weekday, and there were no major or violent protests.

“I expected so much more chaos and constant protests,” said Julia Arber, 22, a dancer who lives a block from the UN.

“I’m familiar with Durban and would expect it to cause antisemitic demonstrations. Some people have been handing me fliers but nothing has really caught my attention,” she continued. “I do have to show my ID all week to get on to my block though, which has been weird.”

This week is the first United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) since Arber moved to the neighborhood. “It’s pretty cool to see everybody,” she said, adding that anti-Israel protests could intensify later in the week, as Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is slated to speak at the assembly on September 27.

Ali, a doorman in a Second Avenue high-rise for the past 22 years, just steps away from the UN headquarters, told The Jerusalem Post the week started out full of protests, but by Wednesday the area was quiet.

He wasn’t aware of the Durban IV conference.

“The protests that I did see, I couldn’t even understand what they were screaming,” he said. “I’m just doing my job. It doesn’t really affect me.”

Several diplomats approached leaving the conference declined to speak with the Post.

Leading up to Durban IV, under the banner: “Fight Racism, Not Jews: The UN and the Durban Deceit,” Israeli Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations Gilad Erdan, former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo, former US attorney-general Michael Mukasey, Oscar-winning actor Jon Voight and others spoke at a conference on Sunday organized by Touro College, Human Rights Voices and CAMERA, in a powerful head-on plea to countries to pull out of the Durban IV conference and to stand up to today’s antisemitism.

The virtual counter-event drew thousands of viewers. “All countries that are genuinely committed to combating racism should refuse to attend Durban IV and the 20th-anniversary carnival,” said Anne Bayefsky, director of Touro Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust, president of Human Rights Voices, and moderator of the conference. “That’s why we held a counter-conference entitled ‘Fight Racism, Not Jews.’ The Durban deceit, the double-talk, the double-standards – and, in particular, the discrimination – need to be exposed and rejected, period.”

More than twice as many countries opted out of the event than the previous Durban Review Conference in 2011 when 14 did so.

The countries boycotting Durban IV were: Albania, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, UK, US and Uruguay.

A series of protests in New York against some world leaders did take place on Monday and Tuesday, such as the new Peruvian president Pedro Castillo and the Somali Abdullahi Mohamed.

The center of protests has been surrounded by calling out Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his administration for their human rights abuses, ahead of Raisi’s address at the 76th UNGA on Tuesday.

“Ebrahim Raisi must be investigated for crimes against humanity,” and “a government of designated terrorists,” were some of the bold banner messages seen around Manhattan in a video posted on Twitter by Iranian Americans for Liberty.