

StandWithUs Was Ready for Durban II



The countries that make up the UN Human Rights Council demonstrated once again that they prefer to bark at Israel rather than address the very real abuses taking place in their own backyard. At Durban II, we shone the light back on these nations, and the glare was witnessed worldwide. At Durban II, human rights activists, students and those whose agenda was being ignored, including refugees from Darfur, stood up and said: No more.

Opening Day at Durban II

StandWithUs Reporting From Geneva

What a difference a day makes! When the StandWithUs delegation arrived on Sunday night, we were not sure how this first day would unfold. Thankfully, to quote the BBC: Today's events were a "public relations nightmare for the United Nations," because they are not dealing with their agenda on racism, instead there is divisiveness and disarray.



Refugees from Darfur added their voices to the protest.



Protesting the invitation of Iranian President Ahmadinejad to address the UN conference.

We began the day with a demonstration against the Durban Review Conference. Students, human rights activists and Darfurian refugees chose from among a variety of ready StandWithUs signs that helped them to express their deep disappointment that the Human Rights Council of the United Nations continues to turn a blind eye to global human suffering. Students came from the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS), National Union of Israeli Students (NUIS), World Union of Jewish Students, and the StandWithUs Israeli Fellowship. Demonstrators wore tape on their mouths to symbolize the deafening silence of the United Nations to Darfur, to the abuse of women and gays, and to children being taught hatred. Our StandWithUs delegation was extremely proud of the passionate students who traveled long distances to stand here today.



Refugees from Darfur added their voices to the protest.



The protesters marched in silence towards the United Nations building.

In the afternoon, at 3:00 pm, Iran's infamous President Ahmadinejad came to address the Durban II assembly of international delegates. Many countries were visibly missing, including the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, to name a few. The Swiss president met with Ahmadinejad upon his arrival, so Israel decided to recall its Swiss ambassador. Many members who were at the event clapped to welcome Ahmadinejad to the podium. But as he began to speak, members of the French Union of Jewish Students stood up in clown outfits, and mocked the speaker.

Police grabbed the students and took them out. A few minutes later, Ahmadinejad began disparaging Israel as a "racist country," and at that point, dozens of delegates stood up and walked out. It was an amazing moment. Students and activists were outside the doors of the hall, chanting, "Shame on the United Nations," and "We want human rights." It was a spontaneous, well-deserved demonstration against the proceedings. All the StandWithUs delegates participated, along with hundreds of students.



The conference descended into chaos as a "clown" protester called Ahmadinejad a racist and diplomats staged a mass walkout.



Iranian dissidents protested against Ahmadinejad.

When we finally left the UN, we expressed our support to a group of Iranian dissidents who were standing outside, protesting Ahmadinejad.

Was it a coincidence that the first day of the Durban Review was planned on Yom HaShoah?

The Jewish community in Geneva organized a heartfelt memorial service, which featured children singing, and Holocaust victims' names were read aloud. Elie Wiesel spoke to the emotional crowd. There was a sea of people present, participating in the memorial service against the backdrop of the United Nations building.



The day ended with a commemoration of Yom HaShoah.



Elie Wiesel addressed the crowd at the commemoration.

We recall that the United Nations was born with noble ideals following the devastation of the Holocaust. Too bad the United Nations has been taken over by undemocratic nations that continue to hijack the noble ideals of its founding members.



Demonstration in New York on April 20 to protest Durban II.

Day Two at Durban II

Our day began with disturbing news from the Jewish student group. They called to let us know that as a result of their protests at the UN yesterday, the Jewish students from the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS) were barred from the United Nations, and EUJS might permanently lose its status as an NGO.

Initially, the UN appeared intent on "punishing" all 150 students because of an incident that involved only the few students who dressed in clown outfits to expose the circus-like absurdity of Ahmadinejad speaking on the opening day of a human rights conference. Clearly, punishing all students for the actions of a few was a form of collective punishment. Fortunately, UN authorities reversed the decision, and the EUJS students will be able to attend UN events in the future.



The events of opening day at Durban II received a great deal of international press.



Anne Bayefsky and Elie Wiesel

At 1:00 p.m. we attended an "Eye on the UN" event, "Lessons of the Holocaust," with its panel of stellar speakers. The room was packed with people, many of whom were journalists. Speakers included Eli Wiesel, Alan Dershowitz, Jon Voight, Father Patrick Desbois, and Professor Shelby Steele.

Eli Wiesel spoke first, highlighting the fact that anti-Semitism still exists. "The world has been able to cure many diseases, but anti-Semitism is a disease that still remains." He defined anti-Semitism as hatred of Jews even before they

are born, before they have developed identities or acted in ways that might explain the hatred. Ahmadinejad is one of those Jew haters. Wiesel asked, "Why would Ahmadinejad deny the Holocaust and claim that Jews 'exaggerate their suffering'? What does Ahmadinejad know about Jewish suffering?" And Ahmadinejad hates Israel. He wants to enter the history of Islam as the first and only Islamic leader who succeeds in annihilating the Jews, and who outdoes Hitler.

Wiesel also explained why Jews so deeply mourn the 6 million dead. He said that a part of the Jewish people was amputated from the rest of the Jewish people by the Holocaust when they lost one-third of the world Jewry. Just as a person who loses a limb still feels the sensation of that limb, so Jews still keenly feel the part of themselves that was



Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel joined the distinguished panel.

lost during the Holocaust. Ahmadinejad threatens the Jewish people by saying that he will destroy Israel. Ahmadinejad did not rule out nuclear weapons. He said that even if Israel retaliated, only a million or 2 million Muslims would be lost, and that they could afford the loss. The benefit would be the destruction of Israel. "What kind of man is this?" asked Wiesel, aghast at the amorality of a leader who could so easily dismiss the murder not only of Jews, but of his own people.

Wiesel concluded by underscoring the moral depravity of Ahmadinejad addressing the Durban II conference. For this man to have been allowed to address the United Nations Human Rights Conference Against Racism, it is insulting to our hearts, our sensitivities, and our morality.

What a shame that anti-Semites at Durban II verbally attacked Holocaust Survivor Elie Wiesel. Watch this ugly scene at www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV3rw_QOD7U.

Jon Voight, the actor and human rights activist, spoke next. He began by saying that he was here because he wanted to clean himself and to clean the air because there is still so much anti-Semitism, and he felt it so deeply at this conference. He read aloud Tolstoy's wonderment at Jewish survival and accomplishment and from Mark Twain: "All things are mortal but the Jew—what is the secret of his immortality?" Jon answered the puzzling question about why he, a non-Jew, would be so attached to Jews and Israel. He attributed it to his appreciation of the Torah, which "gave perfect tools for living" and for peace, love, and justice. He talked about his recent visit to Israel, his meetings with the survivors of terror attacks, and his outrage when anyone makes



Actor and activist Jon Voight quoted Tolstoy and Mark Twain.

excuses for terrorism. He said that the Palestinian radicals have only one prayer on their lips: to do away with every Jew in Israel.



Professor Alan Dershowitz and Natan Sharansky at the Eye on the UN event.

Next, we heard from a very passionate Alan Dershowitz. He reminded everyone that during the Holocaust, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al Hussaini, was a Nazi responsible for the murder of thousands of Jews. He spent the war years with Hitler. He planned exterminations and stopped a boat of children from coming to Palestine, which caused their deaths. He also played a more active role as a collaborator. In 1944, he tried to poison the wells in Tel Aviv. He was an indicted war criminal. He became an Arab nationalist hero, and Yassir Arafat hailed him as a hero and role model. Dershowitz pointed out that there is an unbroken line from Haj Amin Al Hussaini to Hamas. Nazism has not disappeared. It still has genocidal goals through Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran. These radical groups are Hitler's heirs. Nazism is alive and well today as long as Hamas sticks to its charter calling for the destruction of Israel and murder of Jews.

Dershowitz stressed the outrage of Ahmadinejad opening the conference, but denied that Ahmadinejad was a sideline to the conference. He and his prejudice are the essence of what this conference is supposed to be against. And Dershowitz stressed the tragic, unbroken lineage between Durban II and the Nuremberg Laws, between Al Hussaini, Hitler, and Hamas, between Nazism and the ravings of Ahmadinejad. We face a new Nazism. Durban II, he charged, could never cleanse the filth of Durban I. He said that any progressive or liberal who supports Hamas, Hezbollah, or Iran is one of "Hitler's heirs." The anti-Semite revels in the new masquerade—the new anti-Semite does not say he hates the Jews; he says he hates Israel and Zionism.

Natan Sharansky spoke next. He said that Israel does not want to occupy and control the Palestinians. Israel wants to give Palestinians the same rights they have but will not grant them the right to destroy Israel. What is Israel supposed to do when their neighbors are turning mosques into launching pads? Israel wants to give them all their rights, but the Palestinians do not have the right to kill.

Shelby Steele spoke next, electrifying the audience with the freshness and uniqueness of his analysis. He



Author Shelby Steels and Anne Bayefsky

addressed why anti-Semitism is reerupting now and placed the reasons in a larger historical context. He argued that the major movements of the post-World War II period—from the Indian anti-British struggles and the Algerian War to the American civil rights movement—have been wars against white supremacy. White supremacy lost. Decolonized nations became free; the civil rights acts passed. But the newly freed peoples found that freedom was not deliverance. Constraints had been removed, but freedom posed its own challenges. You could no longer blame an oppressor for your own inadequacies and underdevelopment. But rather than struggle with the challenge of transforming the self or developing, these newly freed people put the blame elsewhere. They act in bad faith, blaming continuing racism or oppression even where they no longer exist. That explains the outbreak of anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism in the Arab world, where shortcomings and underdevelopment can be evaded by demonizing Israel. Steele concluded with a Jean-Paul Sartre passage: "The anti-Semite chooses hate—a certainty that he loves. It is not the Jews he hates, but the idea of a Jew who exposes his own inadequacy. If there were no Jews, he would have to invent the Jew."

According to Steele, Durban II was born out of bad faith. It should not have been devoted to human rights and protecting what is bad, but rather to the real challenges at hand: modernization, development and self-transformation.

The final speaker was the heroic Father Patrick Desbois, president of the Yahad-In Unum Association, who has spent his life fighting anti-Semitism and, more

remarkably, finding the mass graves of Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust in the Ukraine. Father Desbois has uncovered 800 mass graves locations thus far. His goal is to give these murdered Jews proper burials. But Father Patrick's goal is also larger. He found that people in the Ukraine longed to give testimony to what they saw and did during World War II before they died. Father Patrick's presence allows them finally to unburden themselves of what they witnessed in World War II. Father Patrick is also a voice of sterling moral clarity. "All Holo-



Righteous Christian in our time, Father Patrick Debois

caust deniers are anti-Semites,” he declared. “If Hitler were alive today, he would welcome Ahmadinejad.”

The “Lessons of the Holocaust” was a dire warning that a virulent strain of anti-Semitism is erupting, but it is now embodied in Ahmadinejad, Iran, in ever-widening circles around the globe—and in the United Nations and its Durban II conference. The speakers reminded us that anti-Semitism does not arise because of what Jews do, but rather because they are. And the speakers called on us to act before it is too late—again.

After the “Lessons of the Holocaust” session, we learned that some European Jewish students had once again donned clown costumes and disrupted the UN proceedings. They were ousted from the halls, but the issue was raised again about their losing their UN NGO accreditation.



Students, led by the European Union of Jewish Students, and Darfurians demonstrated against the United Nations lack of attention to the tragedy in Darfur.

At 5:00 p.m., StandWithUs students and fellows and other Jewish participants joined Darfurians in a rally to demand that the UN act to end the genocide in Darfur. The rally was organized by the European Union of Jewish Students and other student groups. It was an opportunity for demonstrators to let the UN and others know that the Human Rights council has sacrificed human rights by not focusing on the tragedy of Darfur so that they can obsessively focus on Israel.



Students, led by the European Union of Jewish Students, and Darfurians demonstrated against the United Nations lack of attention to the tragedy in Darfur.



StandWithUs CEO Roz Rothstein interviewed a few of the participants.



The demonstration ended with a show of unity against racism and appreciation for the time we spent together.

An Evening With Jon Voight



After a long day at the UN, Jon Voight joined the StandWithUs fellows for reflection on Durban II. Jon expressed his admiration for Israel and our Israeli fellows. Jon Voight was very generous with his time and made the evening very special.

Twenty-five StandWithUs fellows and alumni gathered together at the Intercontinental Hotel to talk and unwind after a dramatic day and were spontaneously joined by Jon Voight, the actor and human rights activist who had inspired an audience at the afternoon press conference, "Lessons of the Holocaust."

Jon Voight is a generous, deeply moral, and idealistic man. It was late, and his flight home was leaving early in the morning, but he didn't hesitate for a moment to spend time with our Israeli fellows. He immediately came over to sit amid the students who greeted him with respect and admiration. In the soft light of the lobby, in his quiet but firm voice, he explained how committed he is to the Jewish people and the survival of Israel and how much he supports what the students are doing. "I'm here," he said, "because when I see Ahmadinejad, I feel I have to do something."

When Voight invited the students to introduce themselves, they opened their hearts to him. He responded with warmth and respect. "How can we tell our story?" one student asked. "I served in Gaza, and I see the media and the world don't understand. How can we make the world understand the terribly difficult situation we were in?" Another student asked how students or Voight could reach out to and change the Hollywood stars who keep criticizing or defaming Israel. Voight responded that a group of pro-Israel Hollywood people have been getting together regularly, and their numbers are growing. Almost a thousand of them would be at a retreat together in May. Ideas spawned ideas. One student asked if it would be possible to get any positive testimonies on tape, which could be shared on the Internet. "What a good idea," responded Voight. "I think I can help make that happen."

Another student observed, "If StandWithUs hadn't brought us all together and strengthened us, we wouldn't be here in Geneva. Durban II might have been

just like Durban I. But it's totally different. We have to thank StandWithUs for that."

His thoughts triggered reminiscences for CEO Roz Rothstein, who sat surrounded by the students. "You know, StandWithUs was born in 2001. I remember how outraged I was about Durban I, which took place that same year. We wrote letters and e-mails to the US government, urging them to leave that anti-Semitic meeting. And now, look, we have expanded to include all of you. We have strength in numbers and strengthened faith in what we can do. And now, I am here, fighting Durban II with all of you."

Voight and the students energized and renewed one another, and everyone left late to catch some sleep before Day 3 of Durban II.

Thank You, Jon Voight!



Day Three at Durban II



The rally in Geneva drew hundreds of proud supporters of Israel. Photo by Matan Safran.

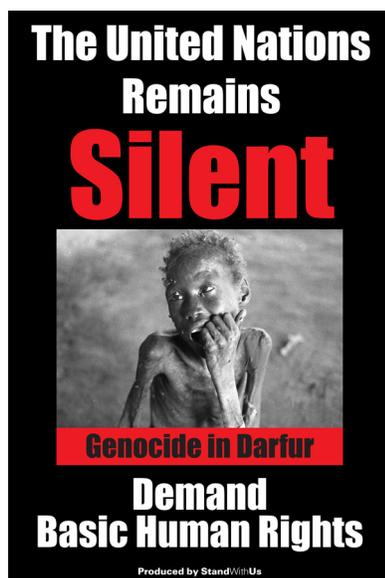
Wednesday: in many ways, today could be called victory day for pro-Israel, pro-human rights forces at Durban II. Students, StandWithUs fellows, a host of pro-Israel organizations, human rights victims, and human rights groups from around the world converged in Geneva, countered the evils of Durban II, and reclaimed the moral high ground.

Yesterday (Tuesday, April 21), Durban II delegates ended the conference three days early, voting to accept the Durban II document. Perhaps they ended early because ten important nations had boycotted the conference, and there was little to debate. Or perhaps the Durban II organizers simply wanted to hurriedly end an event that had become, in the words of the BBC, a “UN public relations nightmare.” But parallel meetings and conferences continued to take place. That’s where the real human rights issues were seriously addressed. That’s where leading international figures in human rights advocacy repeatedly denounced the travesty of Durban I and II, of Ahmadinejad speaking at the opening session, and of the anti-Semitic racism that has driven the UN to obsessively condemn Israel and ignore the suffering and human rights abuses committed by the very nations leading the charge against Israel. They expressed their moral outrage that the Human Rights Council has ignored Iran’s genocidal incitement against Israel and Jews—in flagrant violation of the 1949 Genocide Convention, sometimes called the “Never Again” Convention—and let 6 million die in genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur, while they indulged their obsession against Israel.

These speakers knew that standing up for Israel also meant they were standing up for the rights of all people. They knew they were rescuing human rights values from racists and human rights abusers who had hijacked and perverted their meaning.

On Wednesday morning, a coalition of 20 groups organized a “Conference against Racism, Discrimination and Persecution,” a direct rebuke to the formal Durban II conference, which was supposed to address these issues, but didn’t. Real victim-activists testified: Douania Ettaib, the vice-president of the Italian Association of Moroccan Women; Louis George Tin, founder of International Day Against Homophobia; Nazanian Afshin Jam, president of Stop Child Executions; Ahmed Diraige, a former governor of Darfur; and Ester Mujawayo, a survivor of the Rwanda genocide.

Intellectual, legal, political, and religious leaders spoke out. Father Patrick Desbois described lessons from the “old hatreds” of the past. British MP Denis MacShane described

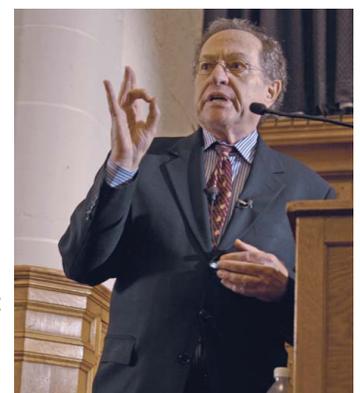


the “new hatreds,” and how we can fight against them for the future. In his clarion voice, Irwin Cotler spoke of the enduring lessons from the Holocaust: that state-sanctioned incitement to hate precedes mass murders, the danger of indifference and inaction, the danger of a culture of impunity that allows perpetrators of human rights crimes to go unpunished, the vulnerability of the powerless and the powerlessness of the vulnerable, and the cruelty of genocide denial that doubly victimizes the survivors by accusing them of falsifying their personal tragedies.

That afternoon, the coalition sponsored a session entitled, “Rally for Israel, Human Rights, and Peace,” a defiant rebuke to the Human Rights Council that had squandered its credibility in years of obsessive denunciations of Israel.

Security was rigorous. It had to be. Over the years, anti-Israel forces have been turning democratic, humanitarian Israel into an international pariah. Hundreds gathered at the afternoon conference that fearlessly defied that image and celebrated Israel.

Roz Rothstein, international director of StandWithUs, began the session with stirring words: “Out of the ashes of 2 millennia of statelessness and persecution, the Jewish people rose up and restored their homeland. Against all odds, they created modern Israel with the international community’s endorsement. They did not restore their land to take revenge on their enemies. They sought life and hope and the right to live as a democratic nation at peace with its neighbors.” Reminding the audience of Israel’s astonishing accomplishments in just 60 years and its humanitarianism, she said, “The world should be celebrating this nation, not singling it out for condemnation. This condemnation is a symptom of a sickness that we must unfortunately continue to fight.”



Rothstein introduced Alan Dershowitz, who proceeded to turn all the anti-Israel arguments on their head and point to the real evil in today’s world: Iran and its accomplices and abettors.

Dershowitz demanded that Iran be indicted for its incitement to genocide and threats to destroy a member UN state. He denounced Switzerland’s president for meeting with Ahmadinejad and charged that Switzerland can no longer claim “neutral nation” status. It had abetted and dignified “Hitler’s direct heir,” Ahmadinejad. Those who say they are liberals and progressives yet defend or excuse Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah are neither liberal nor progressive. They are accomplices of the new Hitler.

Dershowitz extolled Israel for its democracy and human rights record, for its open, self-critical society, and for its contributions to humanity. "In the past 60 years, Israel has achieved far more than Switzerland and every other European nation." He ridiculed the Human Rights Council's focus on Israel, and the perversion of its mission. Nations that have internal mechanisms for investigating human rights abuses and that are open societies where complaints against the government can be publicized without fear do not need international intervention or the Human Rights Council's protection. Israel is among the best of the world's nations on both criteria. "When the best is called the worst, one must turn to look at the accuser," charged Dershowitz. The accusers are a coalition of anti-democratic nations. They fail abysmally in both criteria. They, not Israel, need international intervention. They, not Israel, need to be brought to justice.

"Can the whole world be wrong about Israel?" Dershowitz asked. He answered with a resounding yes. It has happened before. Is there an "Israel Lobby," as Walt and Mearsheimer charged? Dershowitz answered yes again and added, "Lobbies are as American as apple pie. But Jews are not a big percentage of the population in America. I wish the pro-Israel lobby were stronger." Was Israel's military operation in Gaza a "disproportionate response?" Again, Dershowitz turned the anti-Israel narrative on its head. "Israel's response was under proportionate," he declared. Israel had done only enough to stem the tide of rockets, not prevent them from being launched anew.

And, completely overturning the Israel-as-pariah image, Dershowitz declared that "if every country in the world were like Israel, think how great the world would be." Dershowitz concluded by saying that the case for Israel is easy to make, but that the younger generation will have a much harder battle defending Israel than his generation did. Today, Israel is unpopular. It is no longer a "sexy" cause as it was in his day. The young who stand on the frontlines for Israel may find themselves losing friends and potential romances. He urged them to stand up anyway because they will be standing for what is right. The other speakers of the afternoon were testimony to the truth of Dershowitz's words. Prina Gaday, an Ethiopian Israeli; Jamal Alkirnawi, a Bedouin academic; and Vaan Nguyen, an Israeli poet who is the daughter of Vietnamese boat people that Israel had given refuge to; all gave witness to Israel's openness, diversity, and the opportunities it offered to all.

But perhaps the most powerful refutation of the anti-Israel narrative were the stories about Save a Child's Heart (SACH) and about the Darfur refugees. Consider the vitriolic claims made against Israel at Tuesday's

Durban II sessions when Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Riyad al-Maliki claimed that Israel represented "the ugliest face of racism and racial discrimination." Yet SACH has given free, state-of-the-art open heart surgery to over 1,800 underprivileged children from around the world. Forty-nine percent of them have been Palestinian children. Here, you have Israel, a young and small country of only 7.1 million people, surrounded by enemies and terrorists bent on its destruction, and yet it devotes the energy, money, and effort to develop a humanitarian program to bring cutting-edge medical care and hope to impoverished children—even those from countries that remain at war with Israel.



Or consider the personal story that Sudanese Kiconjo Agustin Isdoro Tamer told the audience. She, her three-year-old daughter Venus Basheer, and her husband fled from Egypt into Israel. Venus got stuck near the fence, and once on the other side, her parents realized she had been left behind. They could hear her crying for them, but the Egyptian guards had seized her and would not return her.

One IDF soldier immediately called his mother and wife, and told them to do something. They shifted into action, and called a woman in Eilat who routinely helps Sudanese refugees (5,000 of them currently live and work in Eilat). When these contacts failed, they called Prime Minister Olmert's wife, who reached Egyptian President Mubarak. He made sure the child was reunited with her parents. Today, Venus' mother and father are working in Israel, and Venus is in school. Israelis were under no obligation to help these Darfur refugees, but they voluntarily sprang into action to do so. How many nations would do that?

Just think what would have happened to these and other Darfur refugees if Israel did not exist. The war in Sudan would still exist, but what other Middle Eastern country would give them refuge and help them rebuild their lives? Certainly Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Saudi Arabia would not do so. Israel is the lone oasis of safety for those who are persecuted in the Middle East.

Finally, Israeli humanitarian hero Gal Lousky of Israeli Flying Aid described her group's often dangerous missions to bring humanitarian aid to people suffering from natural and manmade disasters. Her recounting of going into enemy countries and war zones to bring desperately needed relief brought the audience to its feet.

Israelis and Israel do not need to do any of this humanitarian work. A small and young country beset with its own serious problems and external existential threats, it could justifiably ignore the suffering in the surrounding region. But it does the opposite. Yet this is the Israel that the media, the UN Human Rights Council, and others systematically denounce and condemn.



One of the most inspiring sights of this alternative conference was the red clown nose that appeared everywhere on the wrists and noses of young and old alike. It had spontaneously become a symbol of Durban II. When Ahmadinejad spoke on the first day of the conference, a few students from the Union of Jewish Students of France had donned clown wigs and red clown noses and disrupted the proceedings. They were quickly escorted out of the hall. But their protest was a searing summation of Durban II—a circus-like clownish perversion of what the Durban II conference should have been. And the red clown nose had become a proudly worn symbol.

When the conference ended, hundreds gathered at the UN Plaza for a public rally to celebrate Israel. Israeli flags waved and signs that read, "Israel, our democracy in the Middle East" were held high as David Harris, Natan Sharansky, Irwin Cotler, Claude Goasguen, and Gil Troy spoke. It was a day of triumph. True, the flawed Durban II document will be passed at the final plenary meeting on Friday, and the anti-Israel invective will undoubtedly continue at the UN, especially within the UN Human Rights Council, but something had irrevocably changed. As Irwin Cotler declared, "Durban II was not a repeat of Durban I. We have taken back the human rights narrative. Jews



Israeli and European Students celebrate the end of three very busy days in Geneva, happy with their own activism for Israel. Photo by Matan Safran.

and supporters of Israel have reclaimed our identity and our pride." Dershowitz claimed that the filth of Durban I could never be cleansed, especially by any technical revisions of phrasing of Durban II. He, too, declared an important victory. "Unfortunately for the good citizens of Durban, South Africa, Durban itself has become a dirty word." But Jonas Karpantschof, the chairperson of the European Union of Jewish Students, put it best. "Now it doesn't matter what happens over there," he said, waving at the UN buildings. "We believe in ourselves again. We believe in the morality and justice of our cause again. Our strength has been renewed."



Roz Rothstein, CEO of StandWithUs and Michael Dickson, StandWithUs Israel Office director. Photo by Matan Safran.

As the crowd of Israel supporters concluded the rally with Hatikva, it was hard not to be reminded of how few in number Jews are in Europe, and of how vulnerable they have been and still could be on this continent that has turned on them so ferociously in the past. That fact underscored the critical importance—and miracle—of Israel's existence. Strengthened by the coming together of so many pro-Israel/pro-Jewish groups and heartened by the bold restatement of the moral case for Israel, they waved their Israeli flags and displayed Jewish symbols without fear. And so the Jewish people live on.

StandWithUs Is Ready For Durban III

ONLINE EDITION
JERUSALEM POST

Ready for Durban III

Apr. 26, 2009

Michael Dickson, THE JERUSALEM POST

I had been warned, prior to the Durban Review Conference in Geneva, that Jews should not walk around the surroundings of the UN alone, but rather in pairs for their own safety. This was advice which I ignored and thankfully, I emerged from Durban II unscathed. The same cannot be said of the reputation of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

We arrived in Geneva with trepidation; we expected the ugly scenes witnessed at the Durban I conference in 2001, where vicious anti-Semitic demonstrations outside the conference mirrored the bile poured on Israel from inside the UN. Yet we were determined. This time, we vowed, we would not be caught by surprise, and we would not underestimate the hateful attempts to scapegoat Israel by some of the worst human rights abusers.

The countries that make up the UN Human Rights Council demonstrated once again that they prefer to bark at Israel rather than address the very real abuses taking place in their own backyard. At Durban II, we shone the light back on these nations and the glare was witnessed worldwide. At Durban II, human rights activists, students and those whose agenda was being ignored, including refugees from Darfur, stood up and said: No more.

PRIOR TO THE opening of the conference, the Swiss president met with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, citing freedom of speech as justification. This caused noted civil liberties champion Alan Dershowitz to comment that "if Hitler were still chancellor of Germany, he would be welcome in Switzerland."

With this backdrop, we staged our own opening to Durban II, a silent protest, led by student demonstrators. They walked towards the Palais Des Nations with tape over their mouths to reflect the silence of the UN on issues such as the violent oppression of women, the genocide in Darfur which claims a life every eight minutes, the suppression of students, minorities and gays in Iran - and all because of the obsessive focus on Israel.

This was a human rights conference opened by a genocidal dictator. A gathering on racism where Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel was lambasted by members of the Iranian delegation in the corridors of the UN as a "ZioNazi." In the words of a journalist I met who was covering Durban II: You couldn't make it up.

Durban II - a review conference - could never remove the stain of Durban I. The Durban process was a mass diversion. Changing the subject is a favorite pastime of many of the countries who lead the Human Rights Council, which betrays the noble aims upon which it was founded. Its members obfuscate the agenda to avoid answering questions about themselves. They ratchet up the rhetoric against Israel when, in reality, the Jewish state, a free, open and liberal democracy, has a human rights record to be proud of.

The efforts of the anti-Durban activists and the mass walkout of diplomats in the face of Ahmadinejad's racist rant marked a watershed event. The lesson of Durban II is this: The words "never again" mean something to us. There are many nations worthy of sanctions; Israel is not one of them. And we will not stand idly by while atrocities are committed by hypocritical, despotic regimes and Israel is singled out for blame.

Let the countries who hijacked the fight against racism be put on notice: We are ready for Durban III.

The writer is the Israel director of StandWithUs, which educates about Israel through student fellowships, speaker programs, conferences, written materials and internet resources. StandWithUs has twelve offices around the world, including in Los Angeles, Israel and the UK.



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