

Black lawmakers push salient talks on racism

WASHINGTON (AP) - Black congressional leaders are accusing the Bush administration of shying away from an upcoming world conference on racism that may deal with the thorny topic of reparations for slavery.

The World Conference Against Racism begins Aug. 31 in Durban, South Africa.

Its goal is to find new ways to promote racial harmony. So far, however, it has mainly succeeded in reopening old wounds.

A two-week meeting in



CYNTHIA MCKINNEY

Geneva earlier this month, which was intended to draw

up an agenda, ended in deadlock over whether countries that prospered from slavery and colonization should formally apologize and pay compensation.

The United States, for the most part, has kept a low profile and hasn't really spelled out its position.

Rep. Cynthia McKinney, D-Ga., and other members of the Congressional Black Caucus complained at a caucus roundtable Tuesday that the United States is not taking a leading role on the issue.

Slavery was "one of the greatest crimes of all time," McKinney said. "Our nation has refused to confront the enormity of this crime."

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Tuesday the United States wanted the conference to focus on more current problems. "Financial reparations and a formal apology would do nothing to address racism and discrimination today," he said.

But Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., said participation is

vital "for the health of our own nation."

"We've got to confront slavery. In order to deal with a disease, you've to first acknowledge that it's there. This is not radical. It's right," Lee said.

Deborah Carr, who was there on behalf of the Bush administration, said she would take lawmakers' concerns back to the president.

Gay McDougal of the Washington-based International Human Rights Law Group said the U.S. had been

vague on its position even during the administration of former President Clinton.

She said Bush could demonstrate commitment to the issue by sending a high-ranking delegation to the conference.

McDougal said the United States has only pledged \$250,000 towards the conference's \$15 million to \$20 million price tag.

"The U.S. has failed to meet the challenge of world leadership within this conference," McDougal said.

Catholic league to admit black parish

CHICAGO- A Catholic athletic conference that refused to admit a primarily black grammar school, saying parents worried about sending their children to its neighborhood for games, has reversed its decision.

The Southside Catholic Conference voted Wednesday to invite St. Sabina School to join its youth league. The Rev. Michael Pflieger, who had accused the predominantly white conference of racism for not admitting his school, said he was pleased the decision was unanimous.

"I'm also looking forward to the possibilities for our kids to build relationships ... to break down some divisions, some barriers and misperceptions," Pflieger said.

Conference members voted 11-9 last month against admitting the school. Some said they were concerned about the safety of players, parents and coaches traveling to play games in the South Side neighborhood where St. Sabina is located. Pflieger had said he was offended by suggested alternatives that St. Sabina be admitted on condition games there be played only during the day or that there be no home games.

Last month's vote and comments from some members also drew harsh criticism from the archdiocese.

Conference members promised Wednesday to make St. Sabina students welcome.

Executive Director Hank Lenzen said there is some lingering animosity toward Pflieger among members of the conference because of the way he reacted to the first vote. "However, everyone worked hard to get the focus back on the children, where it belonged," Lenzen said.

"The earlier decision not to admit St. Sabina was not made by a sweeping majority," Lenzen said. "We will continue to work to reach a mutually acceptable agreement on safety issues of concern to our member parishes, including St. Sabina."

He said he couldn't guarantee that all the players would show up to play at St. Sabina when games begin in the fall, though. The league has 21 parishes and sponsors football, basketball, soccer and golf for more than 5,000 children in grades five through eight.

Cardinal Francis George said Sunday that he believed the safety of the children was the overriding concern of black and white parents. "Once the admission takes place, we will have to address those concerns," he said. Chicago Police Superintendent Terry Hillard, who lives within blocks of the church, declared the largely middle-class neighborhood safe.

Powell

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Museveni of Uganda as an example, Powell urged African heads of state to get personally involved in AIDS education efforts - down to delivering a strong message in unflinching terms.

"To listen to (Museveni), he cuts no slack," Powell said. "He says, 'This is what is causing it ... it is irresponsible heterosexual sex.' It kind of jars you when you hear it, ... but that is the kind of leadership message that has to be given."

Other world nations, Powell said, should help by providing AIDS drugs, lowering drug prices, putting health care delivery systems in place and, most importantly, providing AIDS education to children as young as 7, "drilling it into them just like we do here with anti-smoking and other types of campaigns."

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