

# Conference final avenue for world to resolve race issues

By Gustavo Capdevila

GENEVA (IPS)—The failure of the World Conference Against Racism would aggravate divisions and inequalities in today's globalized world, warned United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson.

But the success of the conference, scheduled for Aug. 31 to Sept. 7 in Durban, South Africa, would help address frustrations with the current model of economic globalization, expressed by activists in a movement begun at the 1999 ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, and manifest in Genoa, Italy, during the Group of Eight Summit.

It would prove that the global community could work together "to address fundamental values and in fact make progress," said

Robinson.

These motives have prompted recognition in the world's highest political arenas of the increasing importance of hammering out compromises to ensure the success of the U.N.-sponsored World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

The preparations for the international meeting have been bogged down by profound differences on the matters of possible compensation for the damages caused by slavery and colonialism, and on whether-and how-to include the Middle East crisis on the agenda.

High Commissioner Robinson, who is also acting as the conference's secretary general, did not rule out the possibility that these discrepancies could sink the Durban

meeting, which has been billed as key to the current global fight against racism.

The controversial question of Zionism, which Arab countries seek to include on the conference agenda by equating it with racism, has apparently been settled.

Robinson did not express an opinion on the issue of reparations for slavery and colonialism, but in contrast, she said "very clearly and very openly: it is not appropriate in our preparations for Durban to reopen the issue of Zionism as racism. It was dealt with by the United Nations in 1991."

Zionism is a movement dating back to the late 19th century that sought to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, the Jews' biblical homeland.

In the debate on the final declaration for the Durban

conference, some delegates sought to use the term "Holocaust"—nearly universally recognized as referring to the genocide of millions of Jews by the Nazi regime in Germany—to describe all kinds of ethnic or race-based massacres.

The representatives, for the most part from Arab or Islamic countries, proposed including "Holocaust" in lower case and plural forms.

The negotiators involved in drafting the Durban conference's final declaration and program of action—to be approved by conference delegates—have made important progress on that question, Robinson said.

The High Commissioner pointed out that she had discussed the Zionism question with the president of the Palestinian National Authority, Yasser Arafat, in Lusaka.

Arafat "said he wanted a successful outcome in Durban... and understands that if there is an attempt to revive Zionism as racism we will not have a successful conference," said Robinson, former Irish president.

On the matter of slavery and colonialism, the United States and the European Union have accepted the need to recognize past injustices and exploitation.

In that sense, the gap between the industrial North and the developing South has been reduced, she said.

However, Washington continues to be at odds with the draft text's references to possible compensation for slavery, as Secretary of State Colin Powell made clear in a recent meeting with Robinson.

Powell's participation in Durban will depend on the

result of the talks to be held in Geneva, the last chance to resolve differences before the World Conference against Racism.

Diplomatic sources who requested anonymity said that, so far, there are very few high-level officials from the member countries who have confirmed their attendance at the conference.

Robinson herself acknowledged that "governments have been slower than usual" in designating their representatives for Durban.

The South African government, as the event's host, has invited 31 heads of state. Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi will attend the meeting with his current status as chief of the Group of Eight (G-8), consisting of the seven most industrialized countries, plus Russia.

## Video

(Continued from Page 14)

gerian dramas on everything from prostitution to politics.

Most movies are shown only on VCRs - sold, rarely rented, for a few dollars each. Others screen in what passes for public cinemas: dirt-floored rooms equipped with a TV, a VCR and wooden benches.

The quality of most films, though, is mediocre: Special effects are poor, music tracks are sometimes performed on cheap electronic keyboards and scenes can drag on ... and on.

But the appetite for new movies - new Nigerian movies - is voracious.

"There used to be nothing to watch except foreign stuff, American films, Indian films," Ali-Balogun says. "But now we are making so many Nigerian movies, that's all people want to watch. We've killed the foreign market."

Video store owner Ani Emeka agrees.

About 80 percent of his profits come from local films, the 42-year-old says, squatting on a small wooden stool at his shop in a Lagos suburb. "Nigerians love Nigerian movies."

And some other countries do too: The films have found their way into video stores all over Africa. Some have been distributed as far away as London.

Last year alone, 650 movies were produced in Nigeria, up from 205 in 1995, according to the National Film and Video Censors Board.

The films cater mostly to

the three big language families in Nigeria: English, Hausa and Yoruba. A handful of smaller languages and pidgin English account for the rest.

Typical films cost \$30,000-50,000 to produce - a large sum in a country where most people earn just a few dollars a day.

Agoha, the living-room producer, was lucky to find a Lagos businessman willing

to invest \$10,000 in his second low-budget movie, "Catapult".

The true-life script, written by Agoha's wife, tells the story of an orphaned boy who grows up to be a pastor - and discovers later his real father is not only alive, but a pastor in the same church.

Agoha's work will largely be over after just one week of shooting and a second week of editing.

The finished product will then be copied on 50,000 to 100,000 video cassettes and distributed through central markets.

But distribution takes many forms. Producers say piracy is a major problem, and one the government is doing little to stop.

"If we release 50,000 videos, then somebody somewhere is releasing the same amount of pirated copies,"

says director Zeb Ejiro, who's been in the business a decade. As a result, he says, the industry loses millions each year.

Ejiro says the industry, worth at least \$50 million a year, is one of Nigeria's largest employers, giving jobs to armies of actors, producers, directors, cameramen, soundmen and clerks at some 30,000 video clubs.

He'd like to see the indus-

try graduate into 35 mm.

But creating a Nigerian Hollywood would take government help, he says - and that's not a priority in soccer-mad Nigeria.

"The government should be building cinemas in every town, but instead they're building stadiums," Ejiro says.

"We have just one national theater in the country ... and they want to sell it."

**DON'T HAVE  
AN ANTACID  
THE SIZE OF  
A MANHOLE  
COVER?**

**THINK QUICK**



So, you're having a little tummy trouble. You better think quick. UMC Quick Care. Where a friendly staff of doctors and nurses is ready to help. Walk-ins and appointments are welcome, and most insurance plans are accepted. With thirteen locations, there's always one right down the road.

**UMC Quick Care**

umc-cares.org