

Activists chides Obama boycott

By Saeed Shabazz
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Unhappy with the Obama administration's decision not to attend an April meeting of the Durban Review Conference, which is connected to an international race gathering, activists plan to hold a Harlem rally to protest the action and urge the U.S. to participate in the important meeting.

"We want to get the message to President Barack Obama and his administration that we are demanding U.S. participation in Durban II," Roger Wareham, of the December 12th Movement, told *The Final Call*. The four-day Durban Review Conference begins April 20 in Geneva, Switzerland, and is an outgrowth of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, which was boycotted by the Bush administration. Controversy arose over demands for reparations for Blacks and anti-Zionist positions that offended Israel at the 2001 meeting in Durban, South Africa. The review conference, dubbed "Durban II," will evaluate progress toward goals to eliminate racism set in 2001. Significant United Nations conferences are often accompanied by parallel conferences with advocacy groups and government officials.

The Obama administration announced Feb. 27,

through a State Department spokesman, that no delegation would be going to Geneva. The spokesperson said a report back from State Department envoys said the conference's draft document "had gone from bad to worse." The administration believes the draft document is "unsalvageable" because of language that demonizes Israel, reconstructs free speech rights and highlights a call for reparations for slavery, the spokesperson added.

President Obama, in a break with his predecessor, had sent a delegation to a preparatory meeting for the review conference on Feb. 19. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon and human rights groups, such as Human Rights Watch, welcomed the decision.

"The U.S. cannot provide the leadership necessary to promote and protect human rights by sitting on the sidelines," said Kenneth Roth, Human Rights Watch executive director, at the time. Dr. Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, told reporters Feb. 19 it was "critical to show the world that we are willing to engage in a global platform to denounce the remnants of slavery and colonialism."

Days later, the administration's position shifted to an emphatic rejection of the conference. The

State Department spokesman left a window open, saying the U.S. "would be prepared to re-engage" if deliberations were based on a text that met various criteria—including not singling out "any one country or conflict."

In early March, Obama was reassuring Jewish groups that the administration was still holding fast to its plan not to attend Durban II. The right-wing Heritage Foundation said the president's decision not to participate was a "welcomed recognition of the limitations of multilateral engagement."

Lawmakers representing the Congressional Task Force on Anti-Semitism applauded the decision as did the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee who predicted the administration's announcement would push nations sitting on the fence not to attend.

On March 12, the Italian foreign minister announced his nation would not be attending. A week before the Dutch foreign ministry withdrew, saying "the document is unacceptable." IRIN News reported March 2 that Australia was still uncommitted on whether it would boycott, while the 27-member European Union was attempting to get all of its members not to attend.

"One-hundred and sixty nations participated in the 2001 WCAR, and they ap-

proved an outcome document declaring the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism as crimes against humanity," said Dr. Conrad Worrill, chairman of the National United Black Front, and a reparations advocate.

"Also included in the Program of Action was the resolution that the remedy for the repair of these acts was reparations. And if President Obama is not sending a delegation, he is out of step with the world and the United Nations; and he will suffer the consequences of a political embarrassment because of the backwardness of his action," Worrill added.

Cynthia McKinney, former Green Party presidential candidate, participated in the 2001 conference as the head of the Congressional Black Caucus Task Force for the World Conference Against Racism. She explained to a radio audience listening to WPFM-FM's "Jazz & Justice Show" on March 9 that she also felt the administration was out of step on Durban II.

This "certainly calls for (See *Boycott, Page II*)

Abu-Jamal case review dumped

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mumia Abu-Jamal has lost his bid for a new trial in the killing of a Philadelphia police officer in 1981.

The Supreme Court said Monday it will not take up Abu-Jamal's claims that prosecutors improperly excluded Blacks from the jury that convicted him of murdering Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner.

The 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia upheld Abu-Jamal's conviction but held his death sentence invalid.

The appeals court said it would not second-guess state court rulings rejecting Abu-Jamal's claims of bias in the composition of the jury.

The high court considered only the conviction. The state has separately asked the court to reinstate the death sentence, but the justices have not

acted on that request.

A Philadelphia jury convicted Abu-Jamal, who is Black, of killing Faulkner, who was White, in 1981 after the patrolman pulled over Abu-Jamal's brother during an overnight traffic stop.

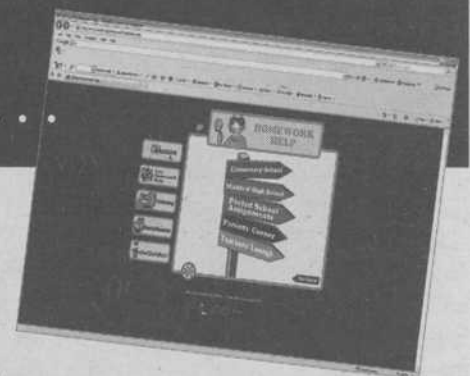
Prosecutors say Faulkner, 25, managed to shoot Abu-Jamal during the confrontation. A wounded Abu-Jamal, his own gun lying nearby, was still at the scene when police arrived, and authorities considered the evidence against him overwhelming.

Since Abu-Jamal's 1982 conviction, activists in the United States and Europe have rallied in support of his claims that he was the victim of a racist justice system. Abu-Jamal, 54, has kept his case in the spotlight through books and radio broadcasts.

The case is *Abu-Jamal v. Beard*, 08-8483.

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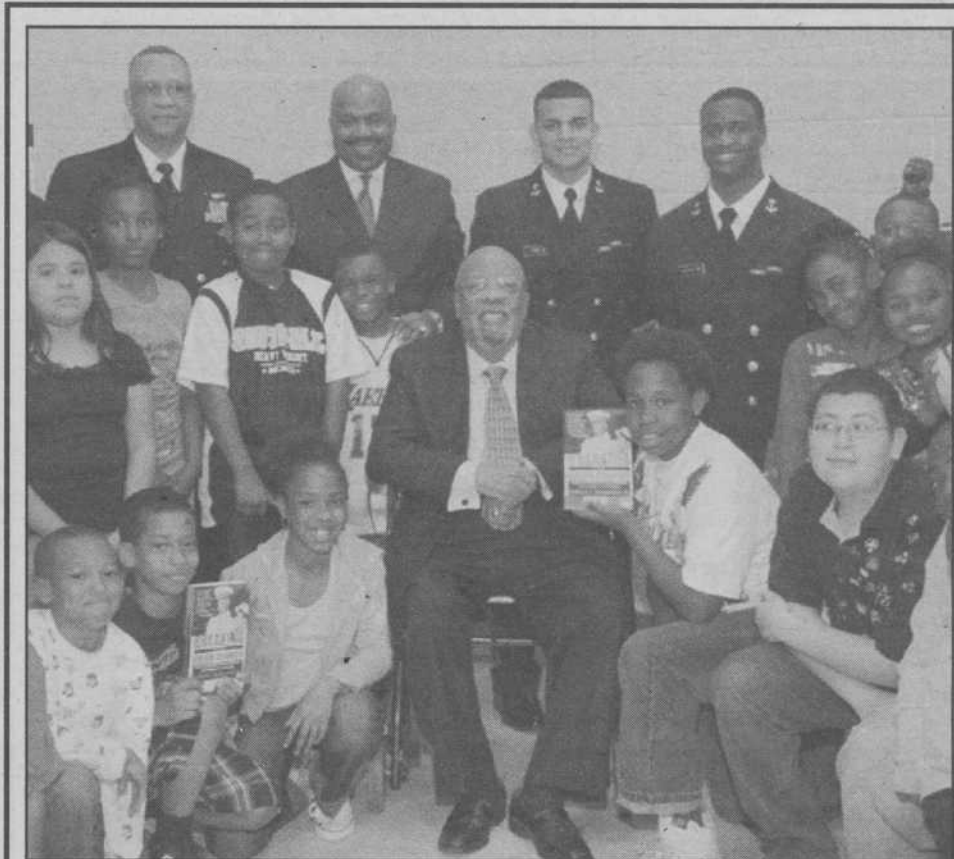
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Sentinel-Voice photo by Marty Frierson

Retired Lt. Cmdr. Wesley A. Brown, seated, the first Black graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, recently visited the Imagine 100 School of Excellence to speak with the students about the importance of education and excellence. The North Las Vegas school is a partnership between Imagine Schools and 100 Black Men of Las Vegas.