

**Address of the Permanent Representative
Of Greece, H.E. Ambassador Mr. Franciscos Verros,
to the Durban Review Conference (General Segment)**

April 22, 2009

Mr. President, Madame High Commissioner, distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My intervention is in line with the statement delivered by Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

We meet at a historical moment of remembrance and reminder. Greece was delighted to participate in the common cause which brings us together: the struggle against racism, against hatred, against discrimination, against injustice – and this as part of the larger struggle for equality, human rights and human dignity

Apart from the efforts undertaken by the EU to bring about the Conference to a successful outcome, Greece decided two years ago to join the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee of the Durban Review Conference. We believed that we should play our part in paving the way for an outcome that would manifest clearly the fight against racism and racial discrimination, of crucial importance for Greece. My country has a long commitment to helping the international community build a common human society of mutual understanding, nonracism, non-sexism, human dignity and prosperity for all. We wanted to share the responsibility of creating a world in which everyone is respected and treated equally.

Many difficult moments which placed the success of the Conference in question were overcome only to prove that the Conference is a unique opportunity for us to think and act for all the people around the world, who have been struggling for the defeat of all kinds of discrimination. Racism in all its forms is abhorrent and there should be strong follow up of this conference and a commitment by world leaders to overcoming it.

The ascent to the Conference was a formidable task, not only for the Bureau which managed a record number of meetings while toiling tirelessly under the leadership of its Chair Mrs Hajajji, but also for the Russian facilitator Mr. Boychenko who managed to harness conflicting and diverse views while struggling with adversity in many forms. In the end he delivered a well balanced text adopted by consensus.

Mr. President

Common ground was found in the context of a UN Conference, multilateralism is here to stay. We hope that the text will serve as a reference point for shaping national policies and action plans to combat racism and discrimination. I should be remiss if I did not mention the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her tireless efforts in preparing and contributing to the success of this Conference.

Mr President

Greece is commonly known as the "Cradle of Democracy", both in virtue of its past and its present status as a modern democracy and pluralist society, has always been a staunch supporter of the United Nations. Under no condition we could accept infringement on freedom of expression as defined in Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The fight against racism goes hand in hand with freedom of expression. We also believe that a culture of human rights should be in place of a culture of hate. The message of our democracies – and our governments – must be clear: there can be no sanctuary for hate, no refuge for bigotry.

Unfortunately, the world is still suffering from deep divisions and alienation. The scourge of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance has not been eradicated. We are witnessing attitudes, which, sometimes, take the form of serious threats to the quality of today's world and its future.

Mr President,

The Greek Government regards the task of eliminating discrimination as one of its most significant policy objectives. We vigorously support all efforts to strengthen international commitment in this respect.

In parallel with the international human rights instruments, our national legal systems must be continuously reviewed. Consequently, new legal and administrative structures have been put in place since the adoption of the DDPA in 2001. In 2005 we enacted legislation on the "Implementation of the principle of equal treatment regardless of racial or ethnic origin, religious or other beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation", incorporating the relevant EU Directives. The aim of the Law, prohibiting both direct and indirect discrimination, is to lay down a general regulatory framework for combating discrimination in a wide variety of fields and to designate bodies for protecting, promoting and monitoring compliance with the principle of non-discrimination.

My country firmly believes that respect for human rights, the promotion of democracy and the rule of law are all intertwined with peace, justice, security, stability, the eradication of poverty and cohesive socio-economic

development. We are currently implementing an important number of international commitments in this respect.

Mr. President,

Our common, our shared principles are clear:

- ◆ Combat racism and xenophobia
- ◆ Pay attention to the humanitarian aspects of asylum and migration.
- ◆ Constantly improve measures against discrimination and in favor of the integration of persons belonging to minorities
- ◆ Prevent and combat the trafficking of persons through comprehensive policies and international cooperation
- ◆ Protect the rights of children, women and the disabled.

Openness, transparency, judicial control and international scrutiny, are the fundamental values of Greece's policy on human rights. Greece believes in cooperation and consultation with all human rights actors, including non-governmental organizations and institutional mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

My country is ready to continue working on enhancing international protection of human rights both now, as an observer, and later, hopefully, as a member of the Human Rights Council, should UN member states trust us to serve the term of 2012-2015 for which we have presented our candidature.

Thank you very much.