

**The
BLACK
C o M M e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

March 19 , 2009 - Issue 316

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)

Obama's Durban II Boycott & the Perils of a "Post-Racial" Planet

By Roberto Lovato

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

At a time when racial conflict and discrimination are on the rise around the world, the Administration of the world's first black U.S. president will not be attending the world's most important conference on race and racism.

In what may signal a dangerous new, "post-racial" approach to global race relations, President Barack Obama's Administration announced that it will not attend the [second World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance](#) in Geneva next April. According to [this article in the New York Times](#), the Administration will boycott the conference to protest what it deems the unfair equation of Zionism with racism in the outcome documents of the first conference held in Durban, South Africa, and now the second conference, also known as "Durban II, as well ." Other concerns cited by Administration officials, some of whom recently attended preparatory meetings in Geneva, in their justification of the boycott include a proposal to place restrictions on the defamation of religions and any language calling for reparations for slavery. According to the Times article, one of the primary reasons for the Obama Administration's decision was that "Israel and some American Jewish groups urged a boycott of the April conference, and several close American allies, including Canada."

Praised by [groups that lobbied against Durban II](#) like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), whose leaders applauded the U.S. decision, "for refusing to participate in a process that would in any way brand Israel as a racist country," the Obama Administration's boycott comes at the worst possible time for [a planet facing rapidly increasing levels of recession-inspired racism, xenophobia and hatred](#).

[Increasing numbers of experts report](#) that most continents - [Europe](#), [Africa](#), [Asia](#) - are seeing exponential growth in hate crimes, ethnic tensions and other manifestations of the racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, the kind on intolerance that will be discussed at the Durban II Conference. And in the Américas, the very palpable rise in racial tensions, hate crimes and other discrimination are well illustrated by events

here in the "post-racial" United States: the [NY Post Chimpanzee cartoon scandal](#), [the U.S. visit \(including a film screening in Congress\) by Euro-racist Geert Wilders](#) and [the massive protests against the racial profiling, humiliation and other practices of Maricopa County Sheriff, Joe Arpaio, to name a few taking place in the United States](#). And these were only the events that the Obama Administration was silent about this past week.

The Obama Administration's silence on both these racial incidents and on such fundamentally racial -and global-problems as the "drug war", criminal justice reform and immigrant detention contrasts with the much-lauded statements on race by Attorney General Eric Holder. In statements made to coincide with the start of Black History Month, Holder called the U.S. "a nation of cowards" when it comes to discussion of race .

Apparently, as indicted by Obama Administration's boycott of the Durban II conference, Mr. Holder's statements are equally applicable to the global discussion of race. Consider, for example, Mr. Holder-and the Obama Administration's- relative silence on reversing [the abject failure and tragedy that is the global and domestic "war on drugs"](#) ([he's actually in favor of pursuing it more intensely](#)) and the unprecedented levels of racialized imprisonment it entails. In the face of the radicalization of racial hatred that is afoot throughout the world, both the Durban response and Holder's Black History Month statements are beginning to sound like the oh so many hollow and jaded ["Si Se Puede"'s](#) and other ethnic, racial "History Month"-like slogans designed to gain favor among former minorities, all the while pursuing right-of-center criminal justice policies that devastate these same communities.

And with its very dangerous boycott of Durban II in response to pressure from the very powerful [Israel Lobby](#), the Obama Administration may be giving the green light to governments and other groups practicing their own brand of racial discrimination, promoting hatred and other forms of discrimination. While much of the media is discussing the U.S. boycott, most of these reports neglect to mention the near universal condemnation of the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians, which United Nations General Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto [likened to apartheid last November](#):

"More than twenty years ago we in the United Nations took the lead from civil society when we agreed that sanctions were required to provide a non-violent means of pressuring South Africa. Today, perhaps we in the United Nations should consider following the lead of a new generation of civil society, who are calling for a similar non-violent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel."

Rather than join the rest of the world in Durban and in condemning the killing and discrimination on the part of the Israeli and other governments-including our own-, Obama's boycott reflects his choice to pursue the more dangerous path to dealing with race, racism and discrimination: symbolism at the expense of real changes to very devastating policies. Such are the perils of our increasingly post-racial presidency in a racially-troubled world.

Political choices like the Durban decision or the blind eye turned to the indiscriminate killing of and discrimination against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank make one wonder if the Obama Administration has also chosen to become the black face of empire.

This commentary appeared originally in [New America Media](#).

[Click here to comment on any article
in this issue or see what others are saying in the](#)
The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator, Roberto Lovato is a contributing Associate Editor with New America Media. He is also a frequent contributor to [The Nation](#) and his work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Salon, Der Spiegel, Utne Magazine, La Opinion, and other national and international media outlets. Prior to becoming a writer, Roberto was the Executive Director of the Central American Resource Center ([CARECEN](#)), then the country's largest immigrant rights organization. [Click here](#) to contact him or via his Of América [blog](#).

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)

[Click Here To](#)

[CONTRIBUTE TO !\[\]\(e474458956c9a37fbf9586ddb60a7fa1_img.jpg\) NOW](#)

[Click Here To](#)

[CONTACT !\[\]\(5361750c22c4e047a52f4eac1ec2d4cc_img.jpg\)](#)

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002-2009
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved