

LEADING MUSLIM SCHOLARS CONDEMN RACISM AND INTOLERANCE AT THE DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE

In April, Hudson Institute hosted a panel during the Durban Review Conference in Geneva with an eminent group of Muslim scholars from Egypt, Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. All expressed disappointment in the conference's failure to address the bigotry and xenophobia displayed in the name of religion in general and Islam in particular.

Responding to the declaration of the conference, Senior Fellow **Zeyno Baran, Khaled Abu Toameh, Tarek Heggy, Stephen Suleyman Schwartz, Irfan al-Alawi, and Veli Sirin** decried its failure to recognize and condemn rampant oppression in the name of Islam.

Baran remarked at the panel, organized by Senior Fellow **Anne Bayefsky**, that “it is time the silent majority of Muslims speak up in defense of universal human rights for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or gender.” She continued: “Humanity is one; labels have tragically divided us, and Durban II sadly has missed another opportunity for an honest discussion.”

“The conference reaffirms the perception that Islam has been hijacked by a dominant minority of thugs, extremists, and anti-Semites who claim that they are speaking on behalf of a majority of Muslims,” said Khaled Abu Toa-

meh, an Israeli-Arab journalist and filmmaker. “Ahmadinejad and his like should be the last to talk about racism, human rights, and tolerance.”

Stephen Suleyman Schwartz, Executive Director of the Center of Islamic Pluralism, added that “all religion and spirituality originates with criticism and freedom of speech. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all began with a criticism of earlier, idolatrous religions, and no religion can flourish without freedom of opinion.”

Veli Sirin, Director of the Zentrum für den Islamische Pluralismus (ZIP) in Germany and an activist in the Alevi Youth Movement, said “the experience of the Alevis in Turkey shows the negative consequences of monolithic attitudes in religion and the use of differences as a pretext for the brutal suppression of minorities. By ignoring the experience of these minorities, Durban II has done a tremendous disservice to many victims of racism and intolerance.”

“Durban II,” pointed out Irfan al-Alawi, Executive Director of the Islamic Heritage Research Foundation UK, “has been discredited by hate speech, efforts to deny freedom of expression, and attempts to limit the reach of antiracism treaty obligations. The ploy has undermined—rather than supported—diversity in religion and culture. The United Nations has repeatedly failed to protect human rights and, ironically, Durban II uses alleged human rights principles to continue that inauspicious record.” Al-Alawi noted that the attempt to limit free speech by invoking Islam was damaging. “Islam benefits from debate and criticism. Islam needs free speech, and Islam is strong enough to withstand negative speech.”

Pictured from right, Tarek Heggy, Khaled Abu Toameh, Irfan al-Alawi, Zeyno Baran, Stephen Suleyman Schwartz, and Veli Sirin

