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[World](#) **Racism summit seeks consensus**



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Thousands have gathered to demonstrate

After a day of opening speeches, the international conference on racism in the South African city of Durban is beginning the task of reaching a consensus and an action plan.

A BBC correspondent at the conference says the dominant issues remain the language that many Arab and Muslim delegations want to see adopted against Israel, and the wrangle between African and developed countries over compensation for slavery.

On Friday, delegates from nearly 200 countries and international organisations heard Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat accuse Israel of racism.

He accused Israel of adopting racist policies towards the Palestinian people, and of ethnic cleansing.

He asked the conference to "stand by us, stand by justice, by international legitimacy which is now being trodden upon by the Israeli Government".



A woman holds a candle at the torches for tolerance service

Slavery claims

A number of European delegations have said they are ready to see strong language adopted on the slavery front, but none that would open them up to major claims from countries that suffered in the past.



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The delegates have a week in which to reach a consensus that will satisfy both the governments involved and the many interest groups who fear their grievances will not receive proper attention because of the inevitable political horse-trading.

Some 6,000 delegates from more than 130 countries have gathered at the conference.

But the summit opened with just low-level representation from the US, Canada and Israel in protest at efforts by Arab and Islamic states to condemn Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians.

Demonstrations

Outside, thousands of demonstrators marched to the venue to demand action on a variety of related issues.

Some 17,000 marchers assembled three kilometres (two miles) from the conference centre, chanting: "Down with American Imperialism", "Landlessness is racism", and "Reparations for slavery".

Most were South Africans demanding redistribution of land, but they also included supporters of the Palestinians, migrant workers and the Dalit, India's "untouchable" caste.

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