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Agenda Item 9: Interactive Dialogue with
Special Rapporteur on Racism Doudou Diène

UN Human Rights Council, 7th Session, March 19, 2008

Delivered by Regina Publil Waldman

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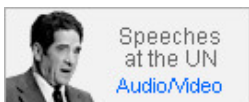
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Thank you, Mr. President.



We thank the Special Rapporteur for his work against racism, and address two areas of his report.



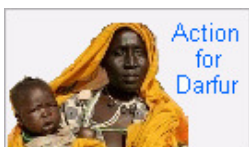
Dr. Diene, in Addendum 1 you mention Libya's treatment of ethnic minorities. In Addenda 3 and 4, you envision a multicultural society based on two principles: respect for historical truth and non-discrimination against minorities.



As a victim of Libyan discrimination, I agree: only with historical truth can we build a better future.



Today I wear my traditional ethnic dress to celebrate my heritage, but also to mourn its destruction.



One million Jews lived in the Middle East at the turn of the century. Today, less than five thousand remain.

Their plight has been ignored by the international community.

Their story is my story.

In 1948, there were thirty-six thousand Jews living in Libya. Today, there are none.

During the 1967 war between Israel and her Arab neighbors, mobs took to the streets and shouted, "Edbah el Yehud!" — "Slaughter the Jews!"

They burned my father's warehouse and came to burn our home.

An honorable Muslim neighbor stopped them, and saved our lives.

The government ordered the expulsion of all Jews from Libya, where my family had lived for hundreds of years. They confiscated our homes and all our assets.



We were given this one-way travel document — never allowed to return.

My family was put on a bus to the airport. The bus driver got out, and tried to burn the bus with us in it. We were rescued from death by two Christian friends.

I come here today bearing no hatred -- only these historical truths:

- Jews have been an indigenous people of the Middle East for over 2,500 years.
- On the basis of race and religion, Arab regimes subjected Jews to arbitrary arrest, confiscation of property and expulsions. This is fully documented in this report by Justice for Jews from Arab Countries.
- The UNHCR has ruled that Jews fleeing from Arab countries were 'bona fide' refugees, victims of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Dr. Diene, your report envisions a future of tolerance and equality. Applying the principles you set forth, we trust you will examine the actions of Libya and other Middle Eastern countries that forced out their Jewish minorities.

Like in South Africa, only the acknowledgment of truth and history will lead to reconciliation.

Thank you, Mr. President.