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**Obama Should Have Attended UN Racism Conference
African American Leadership
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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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I am missing something here. President Barack Obama just went to Europe and Iraq and made speeches saying that he would be deferential to Communist China, that he would meet without conditions with the leadership of Iran and that he wanted to open up a new relationship with the Islamic world. Then he went to the Conference of the Americas in Trinidad and shook the hand of Hugo Chavez of Venezuela who has said some devilish things about America and the Bush administration. But the key issue that took the conference over was the American overture to Cuba to talk, in response to Raul Castro's statement that he would talk with the U. S. and that everything would be on the table. Moreover, the Obama administration has said that it wanted to open up a new chapter in its relationship with the United Nations. To that end, it has appointed an African American Ambassador and put in its application for a seat on the Human Rights Commission. Against this background, the decision of the Obama administration not to go to the United Nations Conference On Racism in Geneva, Switzerland April 20-24 would appear to be a powerful refutation of this relatively liberal approach to the international community it has established.

This was a conference on racism which means that the interests of those who experienced racism around the world and especially in this country was involved in their representation at this forum. Not only are African Americans implicated as victims of racism because of their experiences in this country, they are tax payers and should be able to depend upon representation by their government to deal with this issue in such a forum. Then, of course, there is the obvious point that an African American President and an African American U. N. Ambassador are involved in this decision not to send a representative. No doubt, they would protest that they are following the legacy of the Civil Rights movement in their position and thus, their right to make such a decision but its basis seems to be narrow and counter to the world wide problem of racism.

The administration sent a delegation to Geneva in February to the preliminary meeting and left concerned about the fact that language equating Zionism with racism was

carried forth from the Durban Conference of 2001 to this one. On that basis, they decided -- like their counterpart Republican Secretary of State Colin Powell -- not to send an official delegation. In making this decision, Obama has made a political decision to privilege the interests of the Jewish community over that of Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans. This cannot be perceived as change. This places such groups, who played a decisive role in his election into the category of being expendable. Now I am aware that the Jewish community voted 77% for Barack Obama, support him financially. and they are linked to the politics of the Middle East. I know that, but I am also aware that the entire continent of Africa where Obama's father was from, experienced racism at the hands of their colonial masters. and still do so today.

Most important, there is the pregnant question in the Black community of whether having run a "race neutral" campaign Obama will now run a "race neutral" administration ignoring the interests of the Black community. In that context, ignoring a high profile conference on racism is a gamble that this is indeed an expendable issue, of intense concern only to a handful of activists in the Black community -- that most Black people won't even know that such a conference has taken place. Then, Black leaders, so entrenched in the politics of the economic issues, are likely to given him a pass on this.

Congresswoman Barbara Lee has voiced her regret that the Obama administration will not attend the Conference but I have also heard through Professor Michael Fauntroy of George Mason University that the CBC was refused in its effort to get support from Speaker Nancy Pelosi who told them not to go. Otherwise, no ruckus has been made of this, so the Obama people could be right. You get the government you are willing to fight for.

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