

SA readies to fight racism with National Action Plan

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The conference is the beginning of a public consultation process that will be held in all provinces after cabinet approves the draft National Action Plan. (Department of Justice)

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Delegates from the Judiciary, Chapter 9 institutions and other organisations have gathered at the Century City Conference Centre outside Cape Town to discuss the draft National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), Civil society representatives, religious leaders and the private sector are among those attending the two day National Consultative Dialogue to discuss the draft plan.

The gathering is the beginning of a public consultation process that will be held in all provinces after cabinet approved the draft National Action Plan in December last year.

South Africa is mandated from the Third World Conference against racism that was held in Durban in 2001 to produce a national action plan to combat racism, discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

In terms of the Durban Declaration, governments and all people need to work together to change attitudes, intensify awareness against racism and establish specialised bodies to combat it.

Director General in the Justice Department, Nonkululeko Sindane, says a lot still needs to be done in these areas, “We made significant progress in developing legislation against hate crime and hate speech. Initially we left our hate speech because we felt that the Constitution guarantees free speech, and we did not want close the possibility. But we also recognised that hate speech is very harmful to society that is why we want to criminalise hate speech.”

The United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has come out in support of the National Action Plan.

UNHCR's Margaret Atieno says it is an expression of commitment by South Africans.

“We find that refugees have suffered as a result of intolerance and xenophobia, and we believe that the action plan- even the process of consultation- will help find solutions in terms of addressing xenophobia. It encompasses a lot of areas South African is already implementing, so it takes the country a step further in terms of realising those some commitments.”

The European Union (EU) is also represented at the meeting. The EU's Deputy Head of Delegation, Sofia Moriera de Sousa calls the plan an important initiative.

“Both South Africa and the European Union share one motto - which is united in diversity. Both South Africa and European Union have stood for the centrality of human rights around the world. We think looking together for solutions for shared problems is the best way to go,” says de Sousa.

The National Consultative Dialogue ends on Tuesday.

