

France to boycott UN anti-racism conference

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Macron decided that France will not take part in the event 'as he is concerned by anti-Semitic statements made within the Durban Conference', according to his office [File: Philippe Wojazer/EPA]

Paris, August 14 (RHC)-- French President Emmanuel Macron will boycott a United Nations conference on the fight against racism next month over concerns about “anti-Semitic statements” at previous editions, the presidency said on Friday.

The follow-up meeting of the Durban Conference, named after the South African city where the first edition was held in 2001, is scheduled to bring together world leaders on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September.

Several countries, including France, also boycotted follow-up meetings in 2009 and 2011. Canada, Israel, the UK, the United States and numerous European countries have already announced they are boycotting this year's meeting.

The French presidency said in a statement that Macron "has decided that France will not take part in the follow-up conference due to take place this year as he is concerned by anti-Semitic statements made within the Durban Conference."

The first Durban Conference, from August 31 to September 8, 2001, was marked by deep divisions on the issues of anti-Semitism, colonialism and slavery. Western countries believe that criticism of Israel and its occupation of the Palestinian territories frequently veered into open anti-Semitism.

The United States and Israel walked out of the conference in protest against the tone of the meeting, including over plans to include condemnations of Zionism in the final text. At the 2009 conference, a speech by Iran's then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attacking Israel sparked a temporary walkout by many European delegates.

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