

Honouring over 15 million victims of slave trade, UN calls for end to remnants of slavery

March 25, 2013

UN News Centre

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44488&Cr=slave&Cr1=#.UVHFfFuFQXV>

The United Nations today honoured the memory of an estimated 15 million innocent victims who suffered over four centuries as a result of the transatlantic slave trade, while highlighting the plight of millions more who still endure the brutality of modern slavery.

Speaking at the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, held in the General Assembly Hall, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon cited the words of renowned Martinique-born poet Aimé Césaire, who cautioned against the risks of complacency and “spectatorship” when faced with the evils of human bondage.

“We must be more than spectators. While we recall slavery’s horrors, we must also address the lingering consequences. While we remember the victims, we pledge to fight for equality, justice and peace,” Mr. Ban [urged](#), before adding that this was “the most meaningful way” to honour the memory of those victimized by slavery.

Over the course of the past week, this year’s commemoration – falling under the theme *Forever Free: Celebrating Emancipation* – paid tribute to the emancipation of slaves across the world through films, music, dance, poetry, exhibitions and literature.

In addition, original copies of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution, the two documents credited with ending slavery in the US, were placed on public display at UN Headquarters.

Mr. Ban called today’s event “the culmination of a series of powerful remembrances,” highlighting the importance of memory in fighting future instances of slavery.

“We are here to recall the struggle of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade,” he stated. “We remember their degradation and deaths. And we teach future generations to remember as well.”

In his address, Ken Kanda, Ambassador of Ghana and General Assembly Vice President, warned that the “profound social and economic inequality, hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice,” which many people of African descent around the world continue to endure today was “a distressing and stubborn legacy of this heinous trade in human beings.”

In particular, he underscored that today's meeting was an opportunity to reflect on the past without losing sight of the present, in which "the unspeakable horror of slavery persists" in numerous forms around the world.

"Forced labour and child labour, the trafficking of persons, the recruitment of child soldiers, the sexual exploitation of women, have all been identified by the United Nations as contemporary forms of slavery," Mr. Kanda declared.

He pointed out that although modern enslavement was neither as systematic nor institutionalized as its historic incarnation, it remained difficult to eradicate due to its clandestine nature.

"The majority of those people who suffer belong to the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized social groups in society," he remarked.

"This meeting of nations of the General Assembly, this great pantheon of hope for humanity, must place an active role to ensure slavery is ultimately eradicated once and for all time."

The Secretary-General, in a separate message for the Day, noted that this year not only marks 150 years since the freeing of slaves in the US but also other milestones.

In 1833, slavery ended in Canada, the British West Indies and the Cape of Good Hope. Some 170 years ago, the Indian Slavery Act of 1843 was signed. Slavery was abolished 165 years ago in France; 160 years ago in Argentina; 150 years ago in the former Dutch colonies; and 125 years ago in Brazil.