Statement of Israel

Delivered by Ambassador Mordehai Amihai Bivas

General Assembly Agenda Item 116

Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

21 November 2014

Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. We also thank the delegation of Jamaica, for their leadership and their efforts to bring this important issue to the forefront of the United Nations’ agenda and lead the drive to formally honor the victims of slavery. We also recognize the many other Caribbean and African States that have lent momentum to this cause.

Mr. President,

“Acknowledge the Tragedy, Consider the Legacy, Lest We Forget.”

This is the message to be inscribed on the Permanent Memorial in Honour of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. By remembering the slave trade, we “acknowledge the tragedy” and honor its victims.

Lasting over three hundred and fifty years, the trans-Atlantic slave trade uprooted and relocated thirty million people, who were driven into cruel and dehumanizing bondage. This period remains one of the longest and most sustained assaults on the lives and dignity of human beings in history.

In human terms, the cost was staggering. Many perished on the trek to ports along the African coast while many more died onboard ship, on the so-called “Middle Passage”. When the survivors reached the New World, their situation was little better. Treated as property rather than human beings, they were bought and sold at auction, beaten and abused. Generation after generation were born, toiled and died without knowing freedom. But they do live on, in our memory.
Mr. President,

The Jewish people share the pain of slavery. The Bible describes how the children of Israel emerged from bitter enslavement in ancient Egypt to become a nation in the land of Israel. Because we were born in slavery, we understand the yearning for freedom. Because we suffered from persecutions, we cherish the sanctity of life and the value of human dignity.

Unfortunately, Mr. President, the long arm of slavery continues to touch the modern world. Slavery’s legacy lives on in discrimination and inequality, racism and prejudice. The most fitting tribute we can pay to slavery’s victims is by addressing these issues and by committing ourselves to fighting modern-day slavery, in all its forms. Wherever a child is forced into hard labour, wherever a woman is sold into prostitution, we must put into action the responsibility that comes with memory.

Mr. President,

We cannot undo the past. We can, however, ensure that the tragedies of the past serve as clear lessons for the future and we can honor slavery’s victims by remembering them and what they endured.

In conclusion, Israel is proud to have played its part in honoring the memory of the victims of slavery by contributing to the Permanent Memorial and by cosponsoring the present resolution. We are grateful for this opportunity.

Thank you.