THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS AT MEETING OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE OF THE VICTIMS OF SLAVERY AND THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

New York, 25 March 2015

Your Excellency Mr. Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly,
Honoured guest, Ms. Sylviane Diouf,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour to be with you to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

In thanking Mr. Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly, I also welcome Ms. Sylviane Diouf. I commend her for her tireless work in bringing home the true horrors and suffering brought about by this diabolical trade, through her award winning books, publications and documentaries.

This Day allows us to remember 15 million men, women and children who were heartlessly torn from their homeland on the African continent; forced to cross the Atlantic in slave ships; and who then suffered or died under an inconceivably brutal system of slavery in the Americas.

The theme for this year’s commemoration is “Women and Slavery”. It allows us to pay special tribute to the millions of women who endured the harsh conditions of slavery, as well as additional sexual exploitation because of their gender.

This year is particularly meaningful as we honour the victims of slavery with a Permanent Memorial, entitled The Ark of Return — beautifully designed by Mr. Rodney Leon — which we have just unveiled on the Visitors Plaza outside this Hall.

It will stand as an enduring acknowledgement to the people of African descent who perished or suffered as slaves. It also honours the huge numbers of people purchased by the slave traders, who never even survived the passage across the Atlantic

The Ark of Return will serve as an educational tool for teaching future generations about the Transatlantic slave trade through the United Nations Remember Slavery Programme.
Around the world, United Nations Information Centres are marking this day with educational activities to help raise awareness about the dangers posed by racism and prejudice.

Raising awareness of these issues is just the first step.

We encourage Member States to introduce lessons into school curricula on the causes, consequences and lessons of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

The United Nations Department of Public Information and UNESCO, through its Slave Route Project, are ready to assist Member States to achieve this end.

Tragically, contemporary forms of slavery persist, in the form of forced labour, trafficking, sexual exploitation or captivity in slavery-like conditions.

I call on all Member States to act without fear or favour against all modern manifestations of slavery whenever, and wherever, they occur.

Finally, I would like to commend the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for continuing to take the lead in helping to ensure that the rights of all people of African Descent are protected and fulfilled.

This was called for by the General Assembly, which proclaimed 2015 to 2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent.

The commitment to this International Decade and the unveiling of the Permanent Memorial are tangible signs of the international community’s commitment to work toward eliminating racism.

They are also a sign of our commitment to ensure that the 21st century affords people everywhere the right to live in peace, freedom and dignity.

Thank you.

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