Statement of Mr. Matej Marn, Deputy Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the UN, chargé d'affaires a.i., in the capacity of the Chair of the Group of the Eastern European States for the month of March 2015

on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade
(25 March 2015)

Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver a statement on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Slavery and slave trade were horrible tragedies in the history of humanity, which cannot be forgotten. For over 400 years, more than 15 million men, women and children were the victims of the transatlantic slave trade. The International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade that we are commemorating every year on 25 March offers the opportunity to honour and remember those who suffered and died at the hands of the brutal slavery system.

It also offers the opportunity to remind us that slavery in its contemporary forms continues to exist in all parts of the globe. We commend the work of the UN, its agencies and mechanisms in countering these shameful practices.

Research, education and awareness-raising are important elements of combating slavery and slave-like practices. Different initiatives have been taken up in the UN in the past years with an aim to educate about the history of slavery, its lasting impact, and current slavery issues. Recently, the General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade for People of African Descent, which will be observed from 2015 to 2024.

Today we have added a new reminder on this horrible tragedy. Just moments ago we have unveiled the Permanent Memorial. "The Ark of Return" will not contribute only to honouring the memory of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade but will also serve as a constant reminder that the denial of human freedom is the gravest attack on the dignity and worth of the human person. We are very encouraged to see that with the assistance and financial support of many member states the efforts to build a Memorial were accomplished.

With this year’s commemoration, which is devoted to “Women and Slavery”, we pay tribute to the many enslaved women who endured unbearable hardships, among them sexual exploitation. But we also celebrate those who fought for freedom from slavery and advocated for its abolition. Their work and sacrifices made must not be forgotten. We must also not forget the strength of enslaved women, many of whom succeeded in transmitting their African culture to their descendants despite the many abuses that they had to endure.

In conclusion allow me to particularly commend Member States of the Caribbean Community and African group for their tireless efforts in raising awareness on this issue.

Thank you.