



*The
Bahamas*

**COMMEMORATION OF THE TWO-HUNDREDTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE ABOLITION OF THE
TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE**

AGENDA ITEM 155

ADDRESS TO THE PLENARY

BY

MS. ALLISON BOOKER

FIRST SECRETARY

**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF
THE BAHAMAS TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

NOVEMBER 28, 2006

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,

The Bahamas, as a member of the Caribbean Community, is pleased to join the more than 150 co-sponsors of this draft resolution and fully endorses the Commemoration of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The Bahamas also wishes to thank the delegation of Jamaica and its CARICOM partners for the outstanding work in spearheading the negotiations of this historic draft resolution on behalf of the Community.

Today is indeed an historic one for us all as we are about to set the stage and embark on perhaps the most significant event in the history of our lands. Today's consideration and adoption of this very important draft resolution by the General Assembly is meaningful in its attempt to erect a bridge that expands two hundred years and across the sea and lands of Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean.

Mr. President,

From the creation of this organization in 1945 to today, we hear too often calls urging member states to comply with their obligations to various human rights instruments and conventions, echoed throughout these halls. Today, we as a community, reiterate the call for the entire international community to reaffirm, recall, acknowledge and pay recognition to the human rights abuses and violations suffered by millions of our ancestors in the motherland of Africa, in 'tween decks' of ships during the 3,700 miles Trans-Atlantic journey, on the docks of ports, in the streets, in the plantation fields and in the homes of plantation owners throughout the Americas. The call made here today, Mr. President, is long overdue. However, we can not and should not lament the past but look to the future that the adoption of this draft resolution will present us with. Nor can we continue to pay lip service to the ongoing scourges of human rights abuses and violations that still present a challenge for this organization, some sixty-one years later.

As we commemorate this momentous and historic occasion, let us not forget that the practice of slavery, in some form of another, still exists today. We must not rest until everyone is free from enslavement and is no longer the victim of torture and human trafficking and is able to enjoy his full rights as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a fundamental principle of this organization.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas commends the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001, for declaring slavery and the slave trade a crime against humanity. However, it is disheartening to note that yet again the recent draft resolution on 'Global efforts for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action', recently adopted by the Third Committee of this General Assembly, did not achieve consensus. What are we saying to the millions of victims of

human rights abuses and violations who look to this organization for hope? How is it, Mr. President that we are so concerned about language, terminology and interpretation thereof that the important issues are overlooked? Is it the hope of the delegation of The Bahamas that we can build consensus on the issue of human rights and learn from the victims whose lives we work to improve.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas is proud of the hard work and sacrifice made by its African ancestors in contributing to the growth and development of a country that has a longstanding history of participatory democracy; a nation that still maintains many of the customs inherited from ex-slaves and liberated Africans predominantly from the Yoruba tribe following the Emancipation Proclamation of 1807. Customs such as the asue; friendly societies and affiliated lodges; the jumping dance; ring play and our most popular cultural event, the Junkanoo, named for a former slave John Canoe, still flourishes in The Bahamas and are very much a part of the Bahamian cultural and social psyche.

Mr. President,

As we celebrate today the adoption of this draft resolution, we remember those who have worked tirelessly for the preservation of our cultural heritage. The Bahamas delegation has the sad honor to announce the sudden passing in Jamaica of the Chairman of The Bahamas National Cultural Development Commission, Mr. Winston Saunders. Mr. Saunders was a cultural icon whose work in the area of culture extended far beyond the shores of his beloved homeland - The Bahamas. As Chairman of The Bahamas National Cultural Development Commission, he was spearheading plans for the Commemoration in 2007. On behalf of the Permanent Representative of The Bahamas, Her Excellency Ms. Paulette Bethel and the delegation of The Bahamas, I extend sincere condolences to his wife, Dr. Gail Saunders, and his entire family.

Mr. President,

As stated by The Bahamas' Foreign Minister in his address to this General Assembly during the General Debate in September, The Bahamas plans to undertake a number of commemorative events including a Festival of the Arts which will feature different countries and regions in Africa, through theatre, art, music and dance. These series of events aim to foster knowledge, awareness and appreciation of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its significance to the social, economic, cultural and political life of our society. We are pleased to be a part of this historic commemoration and to re-establish our common link and heritage with other countries impacted by this devastating tragedy and crime against humanity.

Thank You Mr resident