



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY RAYMOND O. WOLFE

AMBASSADOR/PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)



AT THE

SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FOR THE 2011 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF

REMEMBRANCE OF THE VICTIMS OF SLAVERY AND THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

DURING THE 65TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK

25 March, 2011

Please check against delivery

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

I have the honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the fourteen Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). We are deeply honoured to once again participate in this solemn commemorative session of the General Assembly to remember and to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

CARICOM delegations wish to be associated with the statements made earlier by the distinguished Representatives of the African group, and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC).

Mr President,

This year we commemorate this event under the theme: The Transatlantic Slave Trade: The living legacy of 30 million untold stories. The theme begs for poignant reflection on a vast reservoir of voices that were silenced, from a people whose expressions were muted or suppressed over generations under a brutal system of trading in persons from Africa, and of African descent.

There are those who say that slavery is an issue that is past, and we don't need to re-hash a debate on the topic. This idea is one which we do not support since the legacies of that pernicious system lingers on in many parts of the world today – a legacy of hatred, prejudice, and racial discrimination. The proponents of such a viewpoint would wish to silence the debate on slavery, but we feel that the stories need to be told because the lessons from our past, informs the present, and will most certainly influence the future. On this basis, we are seeking to counter the legacy of slavery by inculcating new values and attitudes in the children and young people of today's generation and for future generations to come.

Mr President,

As we commemorate this solemn remembrance on slavery, we take time to remember the struggles of our ancestors and the freedom they secured, quite often through blood, sweat and tears. We recognize that it is a freedom that comes with responsibility... a freedom that is never to be taken lightly and is to be protected at all cost.

All CARICOM countries are former slave societies, which today are proud democracies built on a culture of freedom, borne out of the struggle for emancipation, liberation, and of self-determination. The countries of the CARICOM sub-region were colonized by almost every former colonial power involved in the slave trade. We share a common history of hardship suffered under slavery and of triumph over the architects of that system. We are proud of the history of the Caribbean and cherish it dearly. We represent the region from which spawned the first country to shed the vestiges of the system of slavery – and here I refer to Haiti. It is

well known that from a revolution in Haiti emerged the first society to abolish the enslavement of African peoples, and this was a turning point in world history.

It took some one hundred years after the Haitian revolution, but successive CARICOM Member States eventually fought for and secured the emancipation of our peoples from the terrible system of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Having lost the brutal system of slavery, we attach great importance to our struggle for nationhood, and the subsequent acquisition of emancipation and independence. This in turn granted our respective countries sovereignty and sovereign rights – rights that enable us to effectively participate in this United Nations on equal footing with all other Member States of the international community.

Mr President,

As we commemorate the 2011 International Remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, we pay tribute to our African ancestors. We remember the millions whose lives were lost in bondage, on the journey through the middle passage, as well as those who suffered and died under the brutal system of slavery in Europe and the Americas, including our own sub-region of the Caribbean. We pay tribute to their strength of character and their resilience. We celebrate the things they've left behind, their customs, their food, their music and their religious beliefs.

More importantly, we encourage release for the muted voices and therefore insist that the 30 million untold stories be heard. The once silenced voices when truly liberated will serve to inform, educate, raise awareness and stir consciences where possible. Against this background, we salute those who have engaged in research, education, and advocacy on the issue of slavery, many of whom addressed the General Assembly during the course of this week in the various activities organised in collaboration with the UN Department for Public Information.

Mr President,

The International Day of Remembrance is but one facet of our collective commitment to addressing the issue of slavery at the multilateral level. The decision to erect a permanent memorial at UN Headquarters, in keeping with the mandate of the 2001 Durban Declaration, and in tandem with today's remembrance, is another facet – and together they represent two sides of the same coin.

I am delighted to report that with the assistance and support of Member States from the African group, and other partners, our efforts to implement this tangible outcome has made real progress to date. During the course of this year, we have made advances in negotiations with UNESCO for the international design competition; held an inaugural consultative meeting of donors; launched a website to raise international awareness; and secured more than USD \$900,000 in the trust fund established to implement the initiative.

I encourage distinguished colleagues to visit the website at www.unslaverymemorial.org. It is a work in progress which we plan to update in due course.

On behalf of the Member States of CARICOM, I also wish to express appreciation for the kind generosity of those countries that have already made donations to the Permanent Memorial Trust Fund. We are thankful for the show of solidarity in acknowledging the legacy of this dark period of history. We envisage that other countries will follow in their footsteps in making contributions to the permanent memorial Trust Fund to enable us to reach our target of 4.5 million dollars for implementation.

In closing, Mr President, I would like to reiterate the sentiments expressed by the representative of the Bahamas on behalf of GRULAC – let the living legacies of the 30 million untold stories be heard; and let them be told through the erecting of a memorial at United Nations Headquarters to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

I thank you.

