



PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

**Remarks by H.E. Courtenay Rattray, Permanent Representative of Jamaica and Chair of
the Permanent Memorial Committee
Roundtable Discussion: Representation of Slavery in Film
4 September 2014**

Mr. Maher Nasser – Acting Head of the DPI
Ms. Vibeke Jensen – Director of the UNESCO New York Liaison Office
Distinguished panelists
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank UNESCO and the DPI for collaborating to arrange this Roundtable Discussion, which will cap the almost year-long film series put on by the Steering Committee overseeing the Remember Slavery programme. The Member States on the Committee, comprising representatives from Africa and CARICOM, are committed reaching a broad cross-section of stakeholders through the educational outreach component of the Remember Slavery programme. The key messages of the programme are firstly to ensure that the horrors of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade are not forgotten, and secondly, addressing its lingering effects and the legacies of that horrific period of human history.

As a member of the Steering Committee, I am pleased that we took the decision to undertake this film series, which showcased a range of films from various cultural settings and historical perspectives, across different languages. The selection of this eclectic range of films, from Academy Award winning blockbusters to independent docu-dramas, tells us a tale. Its message is that our present society must be willing to take a deeper look at this dark period of our history and to absorb accurate historical accounts, even when they involve graphic and horrific depictions. These films show us that the facile, stale, inaccurate, even romanticized narrative of Slavery belies the complex and perplexing realities faced by those who endured its horrors. These films also illustrate that the history of Slavery is not as distantly removed from our present day realities and circumstances as we may think.

Any student of literature will tell you that there is more to a story than the words on a page. It goes beyond; into context, symbolism, intent, passion, truths. Great literature and film transcend the literal and speak to our soul. They draw you in; they capture our imagination and evoke deep seated feelings while calling upon us to delve deeper into their subject areas. Their most profound effect, however, is when they spur us to act, to change, to make a difference.

Allow me to segue into another item of rich symbolism and storytelling, that is, the Permanent Memorial to the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As many of you know, the General Assembly has taken on board this project initiated in 2007 by Jamaica, and which is steered by a Committee that I have the honour to Chair. The Committee comprises Member States from all regions with Africa and the Caribbean playing a leading role, as well as agencies and departments from the UN, UNESCO and civil society. We will be erecting in March 2015 (I am speaking by faith now) a permanent memorial at the UN to honour the victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. When it is completed it will become an inspirational and reflective point of focus for visitors, UN staff, and international delegations. The *Ark of Return* by renowned artist Mr. Rodney Leon, is in itself a symbol that tells the tale. It will serve as a place of meditation, contemplation, restoration and healing. It will speak to its audience, telling them the story of what transpired and stirring within them the will to remember, the determination never to forget, and the inspiration to effect change.

I implore you to visit our webpage - unslaverymemorial.org - and our facebook page to get connected to this important initiative. Let us also keep spreading the word about it in all our social circles. We are, fortunately, almost at our target for achieving the required amount of funds (\$1.7 million). Let us work to close the gap that remains, which now stands at approximately \$500,000.

I am grateful for the opportunity to offer these few words, and I look now forward to a vibrant, fruitful and edifying discussion. I thank you.