

**Remarks by H.E. Mr. Courtenay Rattray
Permanent Representative of Jamaica and Chair of the Permanent Memorial Committee
Official Launch of the Exhibit – “Victory over Slavery: Haiti and Beyond”
10 July 2014**

Mr. Secretary General,
Ministers,
Director-General of UNESCO,
Permanent Observer of the African Union,
Excellencies,
Mr. Rodney Leon,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a distinct pleasure for me to co-host this reception for the official opening of the exhibit “Victory over Slavery: Haiti and Beyond”. I have the honour to Chair the committee established to oversee the initiative to erect a Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade here at the United Nations. The Permanent Memorial Committee is comprised primarily of Member States representing a broad cross-section of the UN’s Membership, alongside UNESCO, the Secretariat and civil society. We are proud to have available for your viewing as part of this exhibit, the model and design for Mr. Rodney Leon’s Ark of Return which, after intense competition, was selected as the winning design for the Memorial.

The Ark of Return will be more than just another piece of art in the UN’s collection. It is meant to serve as a place of meditation, a memorial to honour the victims of slavery, a location for reflection, a tool of education and a space for healing. The enduring theme, “*Lest we forget*”, inspires its purpose. It is a Memorial that will be of importance, not only to the members of the Committee, Member States and the wider UN community, but holds a special place in the hearts and minds of the millions of citizens we represent.

It is my hope that as you view the design and the exhibit, you will be inspired to support the completion of the project, and also to make a date to visit the Memorial. The Committee is working diligently alongside Mr. Leon and the staff of the UN Secretariat to have the Memorial completed in early 2015. At this point, I must acknowledge the unwavering and strong support we have received from the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General from the inception of this project. We count on their continued commitment to help us bring the project to fruition.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade are a blight upon the history of humanity. Despite whatever contemporary romanticizing has taken place, we should bear in mind that this dark period that spanned centuries destroyed millions of lives, marred nations and kingdoms, and set in place legacies with which we continue to grapple. Issues of racism, xenophobia,

discrimination and exploitation remain today, despite the formal ending of slavery. In fact, even in contemporary forms, the exploitation of our fellowmen continues.

The Remember Slavery programme is meant to highlight the travesty of Slavery and conduct educational outreach across the world. It is quite fitting, therefore, that the Steering Committee of Member States, coordinated by the DPI, selected this year to spotlight the role of early resistance movements, with a special emphasis on Haiti. The successful resistance in Haiti saw the birth of the first freed colony to become an independent state as a result of a slave uprising. As you know, Haiti is the second independent republic in the Americas. This exhibition highlights some of the important aspects of the Haitian struggle and victory.

As the international community sets about striving to achieve sustainable development, the Memorial should serve to remind us that until we address the inequalities, injustices, and denial of human rights faced by many people of African Descent – those whose forebears the Memorial honours – then true peace and sustainable development may continue to elude us.

On behalf of the Permanent Memorial Committee, I commend the DPI for putting together an excellent exhibition. I thank UNESCO and Mr. Leon for partnering with the Steering Committee to execute the event. I thank my colleague from Haiti, Ambassador Denis Regis, for co-hosting this evening's reception, and most of all I thank you all for sharing with us this evening.