**Welcome Statement by**

**H.E. E. COURTENAY RATTRAY**

**Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations**

**Chair of the Permanent Memorial Committee at the**

**Film Screening of *Akwantu: the Journey***

**Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium, United Nations, New York**

**28th August 2013**

Thank you Mr. Moderator,

Excellencies and colleagues

Eminent judges

Distinguished, talented and professional artists

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening,

I am delighted to welcome you to this evening’s screening of the film *Akwantu: The Journey*. It is a special honour for me for a number of reasons, not least of which is that the film features the story of the valiant Maroons of Jamaica, who were the first group of anti-slavery, anti-colonialism antagonists to force the mighty British Empire of the day to acquiesce to a Peace Treaty – this on 1 March 1739. I will, however, leave it to the film and the distinguished director, Mr. Roy Anderson, to tell that story in more detail.

The screening is being done to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, which we marked on 23 August (last Friday). It is also a part of the annual commemorative events for the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The UN’s Permanent Memorial Initiative is intimately tied to the commemoration of these international days. As Chair of the Permanent Memorial Committee, it is a privilege to have the screening of this documentary here at the United Nations during this week, when we are conducting the final stage of selecting the artistic design that will become the permanent memorial on the grounds of the United Nations, in honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

I must pause here to acknowledge our panel of judges – eminent experts in their fields – who have willingly and so graciously volunteered their time, effort and expertise to be with us this week to assess, evaluate and select from among the seven finalists. Our finalists are also here with us this evening; it is a pleasure to welcome you and to publicly thank you for your diligence, commitment and hard work in creating your designs, making your models and also presenting your concepts and facing the rigorous evaluation by the judges. Congratulations are in order for all of you, regardless of what the judges decide in the next two days. Indeed, it is a signal achievement that you are the last seven finalists from an initial group of 310 artists from across the world who submitted their work to the Permanent Memorial Committee.

1

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Today, August 28 marks the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington, led by American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I could not think of a more fitting day for this gathering tonight, bearing in mind the inextricable links between the system of Slavery, the emancipation movement, leading to the US civil rights movement and the quest for a world based on universal values of equality and justice. While at times, we may view the events separately, we should always remember that no matter where we are from or what our backgrounds, as one humanity we share this planet, this space, these resources, these rights, these challenges; we share in the pains and sorrows of our fellow citizens everywhere in the world, and we, likewise, share in the celebration of their triumphs.

Dr. King was conscious of our triumph over slavery and fully aware that rather than destroy us, it instead tempered our indomitable spirit. In his own words, in speaking of slavery, he said “if the cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely not stop us”.

Our film this evening shares the struggle and the triumph of the Maroons. As we watch, let us take a lesson from their struggle and triumph and as the Permanent Memorial is meant to do, be reminded that such unspeakable tragedies and obscene horrors, such as Slavery, should never be allowed to persist among us in our shared humanity.

I thank you.

2