

"Acknowledge the Tragedy, Consider the Legacy, Lest We Forget".

Remarks by

The Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller ON, MP,

Prime Minister of Jamaica

At

**Unveiling of the Permanent Memorial at the United Nations in Honour of the
Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

New York

March 25, 2015

Salutations

- His Excellency Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly
- His Excellency Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations
- Other distinguished guests on the platform
- Excellencies
- Ladies and gentlemen
- Members of the media

Today is a significant day in history especially for Africans at home and in the
Diaspora.

As Bob Marley sang: "There's a natural mystic flowing through the air. If you listen carefully you will hear."

Today, is all the more fitting for this International Day of Commemoration, as it was on March 25, 1807 that one European nation, Britain, passed a law to ban the forced relocation of our ancestors.

Slavery continued for much longer. So for us, freedom came after a long journey. Freedom was not gifted to us, but was rather, earned by the sweat and blood of millions of our forebears, on whose backs the economic foundations of the New World were built.

Our people were strengthened by the hope of freedom and emboldened by the certainty of the inalienable right of every man, woman and child to a life of dignity and equality.

The indomitable spirit of our ancestors triumphed and conquered the "Door of No Return". Here we are today, in New York to unveil the Permanent Memorial - ***The Ark of Return.***

For generations of Africans, the return to their home, language and lifestyle, kept the flames of freedom burning, and the embers of hope smoldering through the centuries.

I stand before you today with mixed emotions: celebrating the ultimate triumph over the inhumane conditions of the Middle Passage and the reprehensible economic and social architecture of plantation slavery.

At the same time, I, the proud daughter of the Ashanti Queen, Nanny of the Maroons, cannot ignore the unspeakable tragedy of the many millions who succumbed to the dastardly conditions, and whose memories now pave the annals of our history.

My soul remains tortured by the historical memory of the travails of the Middle Passage, as recounted in the book, "An account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa" by Dr. Alexander Falconbridge, a British surgeon who took part in four voyages in slavers between 1780 and 1787:

"The slaves lie on bare planks. The surgeon, upon going between decks, in the morning, to examine the situation, frequently finds several dead. These dead

slaves are thrown to the sharks. It often happens that those who are placed at a distance from the latrine buckets, in trying to get to them, tumble over their companions, as a result of being shackled. This situation is added to by the tubs being too small and only emptied once every day.”

Today, our sensibilities are not shaped just by the painful memories. Rather, our vision of the self and the future is fired by the light of liberty for which many of our ancestors fought and died.

I am proud that the countries of the Caribbean Community took the lead in initiating this project with the support of the African Union. Jamaica has had the honour to chair the Committee to oversee the Permanent Memorial project.

I salute all the artists who participated in the design competition, the eminent judges and the winner – Rodney Leon – who designed the Memorial, and as the Architect, also delivered the final product.

I am grateful to all the countries that stood with Jamaica to ensure that funding was secured.

As we unveil this **Permanent Memorial at the United Nations in Honour of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**, may the people of the world never again experience such tragedy and inhumanity as chattel slavery.

Let this Memorial be a motivating force to galvanise our individual and collective resolve to stamp out the contemporary evil of modern day slavery, child labour and human trafficking.

May we use this Memorial to say “NO” to all forms of racism, discrimination and intolerance, and maintain the fight to end racial discrimination and injustice wherever in the world they exist.

May the souls of the millions who endured the African holocaust rest in peace.

I thank you.