



**PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

WELCOME REMARKS BY

**H.E. E COURTENAY RATTRAY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF JAMAICA
AND
CHAIR OF THE PERMANENT MEMORIAL COMMITTEE**

**AT THE HIGH-LEVEL PLEDGING LUNCHEON
FOR THE PERMANENT MEMORIAL**

**UNITED NATIONS
10th DECEMBER 2014**

Mr President,
Deputy Secretary-General
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Esteemed guests,

The honour and privilege is mine to extend to you a very warm welcome to this high-level luncheon for the Permanent Memorial. I want to first of all, on behalf of the Permanent Memorial Committee, thank H.E. Mr Sam Kutesa for deciding to host this luncheon on the occasion of the launch of the International Decade for People of African Descent. It is quite fitting that both these events are taking place on the same day, bearing in mind that while they are distinct, they are both birthed from the World Conference Against Racism (Durban) process and both share similar goals - calling attention to the situation of people of African descent and compelling appropriate action to address discrimination, racism and inequality around the world.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Kingsley Mamabolo, Permanent Representative of South Africa, for his commendable work in steering the negotiation of the programme of activities for the Decade; the Ambassador, his government and the people of South Africa have been firm supporters of the permanent memorial initiative evidenced by South Africa's political support and multiple financial contributions to the Fund, to which they are the second highest single contributor.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is so much that could be said about this project and its meaningfulness. Noting however, that the time is short and the meal is ready to be served, I will try to be quite succinct.

After facing centuries of discrimination, violence, inequalities, dehumanisation and death, Africans and their descendants faced the promise of hope and greater future after the abolitions of the Slave Trade and Slavery, as well as decolonisation. The contemporary reality as we know has taken a different turn. We live in a world where African descendants are still dehumanised, are subject to discrimination and violence, and must overcome systemic inequalities on the economic and social fronts. In all our countries, developed and developing, big and small, ancient or new, we inhabit a world where African descendants still face an uphill battle.

This ought not be so, and in fact, this is part of what we are working to redress. The programme of activities for the international decade contains many goals and actions to drive us all towards a more equal world. Likewise, the permanent memorial will stand as a symbol of what our ancestors have endured and as a reminder of what we need to work towards. As described by the panel of judges on selection of the Ark of Return at the end of the year-long international design competition, it will be a "sacred space" a memorial that is "spiritually uplifting, reflecting the process of transition from trauma to healing". It will be a "symbolic spiritual space and object where one can interact and pass through for acknowledgment, contemplation, mediation, reflection, healing, education and transformation".

Our need to redress racial discrimination issues is great. This is why your support for the permanent memorial, be it political, symbolic or financial is so important. The Ark of Return, a description of which Mr. Leon will shortly present to us, will be a demonstration of our collective resolve to counter the negative legacies of Slavery, including racism and discrimination. The

Memorial will speak to all who visit it and who learn of it compelling our individual and collective action to change for the better.

The General Assembly has unanimously supported this venture annually on seven successive occasions because these goals speak to the very aims and purposes of the United Nations: to create a more equal world where all citizens are treated with full respect for their human rights. I count on your continued commitment and support to bring the memorial into reality.

As we mark International Human Rights Day, let me end with a quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it is Article 4:

“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”

Our Memorial is the symbol of this commitment.

I thank you.