



General Assembly

Seventy-third session

38th plenary meeting

Wednesday, 21 November 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Ms. Espinosa Garcés. (Ecuador)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 121

Commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade

Report of the Secretary-General (A/73/88)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries forced millions of people in Africa to leave their homes, villages and lands to be subjected to an institutionalized exploitation that was based on amassing resources. Loss of life and human dignity was the price paid for that act. The impacts of that great tragedy endure to this day. The General Assembly should continue to contribute to a better understanding of the causes and consequences of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in order to prevent any forms of subjugation or discrimination from being repeated in our history.

The designation of 25 March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade has contributed to honouring the memory of the victims of slavery and to warning of the dangers of racism. Unfortunately, racial discrimination is not a thing of the past. We must maximize our efforts against racism and all related forms of discrimination and intolerance. We must preserve and increase educational and cultural programmes, and strengthen the initiatives to raise awareness about slavery and the transatlantic slave trade carried out in the past three years by the United Nations system, Member States and

civil society. I would like to highlight that the General Assembly's designation of the decade 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent has contributed to promoting greater knowledge of the heritage and culture of people of African descent and raising awareness of their contributions to the development of societies.

Four centuries of slavery have permanently impacted the history of humankind. We must recognize that part of history and never repeat it. And we must promote reconciliation. I commend the States that have contributed to the trust fund for the *Ark of Return*, the beautiful permanent memorial at United Nations Headquarters that honours the victims of slavery. One of the best ways to honour the victims of slavery is to recognize the complex realities that their descendants face. Through their work and cultural diversity, they have enriched the regions in which they live. We must preserve that cultural wealth while also combating the unjust social stratifications that were established in the colonial era and which continue to exist in many countries. Let us honour the victims of slavery by achieving inclusive societies that are more just and by combating and eradicating poverty and inequality.

The *Ark of Return* reminds us of the past, but also of the present. Today, more than 40 million people in the world are victims of modern forms of slavery. Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls on States to take immediate and effective measures to end modern slavery. There is no doubt that in December 2018 the best way to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal

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Declaration of Human Rights would be to renew our commitments to eradicating slavery in all its forms, rejecting racism and racial prejudice, and continuing to work to teach future generations about the dangers of tolerating exploitation and inequalities. Let us once and for all overcome discrimination and inequality, the remnants of the darkest age of humankind, and move towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. That can be our greatest tribute to the past and present victims of slavery, discrimination and exclusion.

Ms. Carey (Bahamas): I have the honour of delivering, on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), this statement on agenda item 121, regarding the report of the Secretary-General on the programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery (A/73/88).

The triangular slave trade between Africa, Europe and the Americas lasted for more than 400 years. During that period, it is estimated that between 15 to 18 million men, women and children were the victims of the transatlantic slave trade. That is one of the darkest chapters of human history. Human beings were reduced to commodities and exploited for profit as a means to enrich and maintain the status quo of the colonial entities.

In this twenty-first century, as we witness a new dawn of civilization, it is imperative that the human race never forget that evil, which once scourged our world. That is why the Caribbean Community, a region largely populated by descendants of the Africans condemned to slavery and forcibly transported across the Atlantic Ocean by means of the abhorrent transatlantic slave trade, strongly supports global, regional and local initiatives to highlight the lessons of the transatlantic slave trade. We also support the need to continue to educate and raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice, and to promote the legacy and contributions of people of African descent, as well as their triumphs and struggles for freedom and equality.

The members of the Caribbean Community, with the support of the African Union, were at the forefront of efforts to erect the *Ark of Return* at United Nations Headquarters. The permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade was unveiled on 25 March 2015, the day that is observed as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave

Trade. The placement of the memorial at United Nations Headquarters is a significant symbol of what the United Nations represents, namely, the promotion and preservation of the dignity and worth of all human beings — principles that are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The *Ark of Return* honours the memories of the men, women and children who were the victims of what is now generally accepted as a crime against humanity. The permanent memorial also serves as an acknowledgement of the crimes and atrocities perpetrated over the course of four centuries, during which millions of Africans were violently removed from their homelands, ruthlessly abused and robbed of their dignity.

The world has learned that the transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration event in history. The legacy lives on today in the families and countries that were affected. The permanent memorial also reminds the world of the bravery of those slaves, abolitionists and unsung heroes who managed to rise up against an oppressive system and put an end to that odious practice. It is intended that the memorial continue to serve as a motivating force to galvanize our individual and collective resolve to stamp out the contemporary manifestations of modern-day slavery, child labour and human trafficking.

In that connection, we applaud the creation of the Remember Slavery website within the United Nations network, which serves as a permanent reservoir of data on commemorative activities, United Nations initiatives and literature on the ways in which enslaved Africans and their descendants influenced and continue to shape every sphere of society around the world. CARICOM also notes with appreciation the weekly tours and briefings at the *Ark of Return*, which are intended to provide visitors to the United Nations with an understanding of those tragic occurrences.

CARICOM is also appreciative of the launch of the outreach programme to mobilize educational institutions, civil society and other organizations to inculcate in future generations an understanding of the causes, consequences and lessons of the transatlantic slave trade and communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice.

CARICOM thanks the Secretary-General for his report on the programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, which

itemizes the plethora of ongoing initiatives on this topic, including this year's exhibit at the United Nations entitled "A Legacy of Black Achievement". CARICOM also commends the United Nations Department of Information and Communications for its involvement in facilitating that programme. The Caribbean Community also acknowledges the extensive support rendered by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization towards the establishment of an educational outreach programme and the creation of the *Ark of Return*.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. It shatters false notions of superiority and inferiority. Our memorial reminds the world never to forget and to say it loud. The world must never forget, so that that unspeakable evil is never again perpetuated on societies. We must ensure that people's prospects and achievements are not marked by the colour of their skin or ethnic background.

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): Today's debate provides an important opportunity to pay tribute to the victims of one of the worst chapters in human history, but also to reflect on the challenges that remain with regard to slavery in our own times.

Spanning nearly four centuries, over 15 million men, women and children were victims of the transatlantic slave trade. The victims were forcibly removed from their families and homes and transferred overseas in the most appalling and inhumane conditions. Those who survived the brutal journey were subjected to forced labour and abuse and were thereby permanently deprived of their most basic human rights. We must never forget our common commitment to ensuring the absolute prohibition of slavery in all its forms, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Adopted 70 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has brought about significant change in the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms around the world. As to the absolute prohibition of slavery, however, we are perhaps furthest away from its full implementation. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is unequivocal in its proclamation that "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

Nevertheless, slavery persists. It did not disappear with the end of the transatlantic slave trade in the 1800s; in fact, there are more slaves today than at the height of the transatlantic slave trade. Today, an estimated 40 million people live in conditions that qualify as modern slavery — more people than ever before. Despite the fact that slavery is outlawed universally, human trafficking and enslavement are crimes committed on a large scale and with widespread impunity. Every country is affected by modern slavery in very different forms. An estimated \$150 billion are generated through slavery practices every year. Modern slavery and human trafficking are not only one of the biggest human rights scandals of our time, they are also among the most lucrative business models of organized crime.

In the light of that, Liechtenstein is currently focusing its fight against modern slavery on two particular aspects. First, we are trying to address the business side of modern slavery. Given that modern slavery is among the most profitable illegal business models, we can make use of tools that have proven effective in other areas to disrupt financial flows by using relevant data for criminal prosecutions — in short, to follow the money. Leveraging the crucial role played by the private sector is key.

The financial sector, in particular, can help to tackle modern slavery in the areas of lending and investment, compliance, sustainability and innovation. This is why, together with our partners, Australia and the United Nations University, we have launched a Financial Sector Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, also known as the Liechtenstein initiative. It brings together actors from retail banks, hedge funds, global regulators, institutional investors and survivors, as well as the United Nations and the anti-slavery movement. The Financial Sector Commission is working to develop actionable measures that the global financial sector can build on in order to tackle modern slavery and human trafficking. The Commission focused its first meeting this past September on financial-sector compliance. The next meeting of the Commission will address the role of responsible lending and investment in tackling modern slavery and human trafficking.

Secondly, we are working to address the enormous impunity gap. As national judiciaries have systematically failed to prosecute grave cases of modern slavery and human trafficking, there is a clear

need to make use of international justice, in particular the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the ICC, has jurisdiction over enslavement, both as a war crime and as a crime against humanity. Given the universal nature of the phenomenon of modern slavery, the Court could play a dual role by creating incentives for States to investigate and prosecute at the national level, and, where that fails, carrying out the investigation and prosecution itself where the impunity gap persists. We will continue exploring such options together with the Court.

Modern-day slavery is a complex phenomenon that affects all of us and should leave no one indifferent. As individuals, as diplomats and as consumers, we all have an opportunity to contribute to the eradication of this major human rights crisis of our time. That, we believe, is the best contribution we can make to commemorating this Day of Remembrance in a meaningful way.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bahamas on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

Cuba participated in the negotiations and supported resolutions 61/19 and 70/7, commemorating the bicentennial of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, which designated this International Day of Remembrance and established a permanent memorial. My country attaches particular importance to the annual commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, a matter that is especially dear to the hearts of the Cuban people.

It would be an unforgivable historical error to ignore or pretend to forget that past. By introducing the slave trade into the western hemisphere, the former colonial Powers committed an unjustifiable crime against humanity. The major beneficiaries of the conquest and colonization and of slavery and the slave trade must assume their responsibility and provide compensation for the horrendous crimes committed.

The Secretary-General's report (A/73/88) leads us to reflect on the importance of fulfilling the precepts set forth in the Durban Declaration, particularly paragraphs 98 to 102, as well as the activities included in its Programme of Action, concerning the teaching and understanding of the historical truth about the tragedy of slavery.

Approximately 1.3 million Africans arrived in Cuba as slaves. They and their descendants were protagonists in the various stages of our struggles for our ultimate liberation. The people of Cuba are very proud of their African roots. From Africa, we inherited the combative spirit, sensibility, joy, strength in the face of adversity and love of freedom that are characteristic of the Cuban people. No other people of the world have contributed as much to forge the Cuban nation as the African people.

Mr. Arrocha Ruiz (Panama), Vice-President, took the Chair.

On that basis, the Cuban State, with the active support and participation of civil society, has developed a broad educational and cultural promotion programme that covers the entire country at all levels — from the centre out to the communities. Those programmes seek the broadest possible dissemination and understanding of an issue that is part of our history, and aim to maintain and consolidate our African cultural roots.

We are pleased that the report reflects the realization, under the auspices of the United Nations and at the national level, of a broad programme of activities throughout the period under consideration, with the active participation of many countries, including Cuba. Nevertheless, it is not enough. We need greater political will, because slavery is not merely a historical phenomenon. Well into the twenty-first century, almost 40 million people are now subject to similar conditions. We must urgently press ahead to reach Goal 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which will be unattainable if we do not intensify efforts to eliminate modern slavery. The rightful requests for compensation by Caribbean Community member States must be addressed. Developing countries in general, and African developing countries in particular, must receive the special and differentiated treatment that they require in their international economic relations.

There is a great deal of wealth in today's world that is the product of the shameful and disgraceful practices of slavery and the slave trade. The international community is morally obligated to contribute to reparations for the crimes committed and to ensure, through education campaigns for current and future generations, that crimes of that nature are never committed again.

Mr. Kai-Kai (Sierra Leone): My delegation thanks the President for convening this meeting

to commemorate the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General for his 4 June report, contained in document A/73/88, on the programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. I also commend the Department of Public Information, interested Member States, UNESCO and civil society for the three consecutive years of hosting productive commemorative events and public awareness engagements, thereby ushering in a period of resurgence in remembering the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

Sierra Leone welcomes the report and commends the Department of Public Information for the organization of the three commemorative ceremonies for the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade since 2015 on the themes of the heritage and culture of the African diaspora, the legacy and contributions of people of African descent, and the triumphs and struggles for freedom and equality, respectively.

My delegation continues to pay tribute to the community of interested States, States members of the Caribbean Community, the African Union and generous contributors to the Memorial Trust Fund for their primary and pivotal role in the erection of the *Ark of Return* at its prominent site at United Nations Headquarters — a permanent memorial honouring the dehumanized and almost forgotten victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

At a time when the egregious offshoots of the slave trade — institutional racism, discrimination and xenophobia — are resurfacing and are often camouflaged with the euphemism of nationalism, the importance for States to reaffirm and implement the commitments espoused in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action on countering the legacy of slavery and contributing to the restoration of the dignity of the victims of slavery and the slave trade cannot be overemphasized.

That collective commitment must be meaningful. In recalling resolution 68/237 of 23 December 2013, proclaiming the International Decade for People of African Descent, Sierra Leone strongly affirms the imperative to recognize the contributions of enslaved people and their descendants, especially the contributions made to the societies that forced them into bondage. It is but fitting, therefore, to note the alignment

of the themes and activities of the “Remembering Slavery: Recognition, Justice and Development” exhibition with those of the International Decade for People of African Descent. In our view, that affords us an opportunity to showcase the contributions and recognize the representative and distinct human rights of the estimated 200 million people identifying with that group as we work to combat racism and prejudice.

Sierra Leone is deeply committed to increasing educational outreach on slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, whether at the United Nations or at home. As reported by the Secretary-General on 24 March 2016, our delegation, in observance of the International Day of Remembrance and with the co-sponsorship of the Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the United Nations and the Monuments and Relics Commission in Sierra Leone, organized a panel discussion entitled “The Transatlantic Slave Trade: Constructing New Amistad, Bunce Island, Gullah, Maroon and Nova Scotia Bridges”.

In the side event, held here at United Nations Headquarters, we were reminded by Ms. Sylviane A. Diouf of Sierra Leone’s unique position in the horrific tragedy. Sierra Leone was at the confluence of several migratory movements. It was a place of departure, a place of return, a place of exile and a place of refuge — the province of freedom. We were reminded of the commercial, industrial-scale operations at Bunce Island, a place that still bears the hallmarks of the tragedy, even in its present state of ruin. We were reminded of how 400,000 people were taken from present-day Sierra Leone for their skills in growing rice. Indeed, we were reminded of the *Amistad* and the belief in the idea and ideals of freedom long held by the captured slaves led by Sengbe Pieh, long before those ideas and ideals were codified in the Charter of the United Nations.

As we are reminded of the impact of the slave trade, we must be mindful of the risk of the present generation forgetting the past and depriving the future of the knowledge of the slave-trade horror, so that we can all say: “Never again!” My delegation joins the call for following through on our resolve to design curricula for institutions of learning — from primary schools to higher education institutions — incorporating accounts on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery into school programmes in order to educate and inculcate present and future generations with an understanding of the lessons, history and consequences of the tragedy.

The present challenges, in the form of institutional racism, discrimination and prejudice, can be well understood and addressed only within the context of the history of the slave trade. In Sierra Leone, as the Government declares free quality education for all pupils in Government and Government-assisted schools, the educational outreach drive will, for the first time, be extended to children and indirectly to their parents, who were previously denied the opportunity to learn about the lessons, history and consequences of slavery in formal institutions.

With respect to raising public awareness about commemorative activities on slavery and the slave trade and the permanent memorial, my delegation notes the invaluable work carried out by United Nations information centres. However, we believe that more needs to be done. For example, the Secretary-General's report indicates that the information centre based in Accra, which services Sierra Leone, did not hold any outreach activity in Sierra Leone during the reporting period. It is hoped that the message of the *Ark Of Return*, captured in its triangular elements entitled "Acknowledge the tragedy", "Consider the legacy" and "Lest we forget", will be taken to the place of return — Sierra Leone.

Finally, it is our honest belief that the true hidden value of the commemoration events lies not only in honouring the lives lost or celebrating the resilience of the descendants, but also in building bridges between people of African descent and Africa. Time and again, we have witnessed and observed the unbridled joy when people of African descent trace and rediscover their lost homes in Africa. Those journeys of rediscovery and the contributions of people of African descent must be celebrated.

That is why Sierra Leone applauds initiatives like the Most Influential People of African Descent award, which brought to New York and United Nations Headquarters a global pool of influential people of African descent under 40, including the First Lady of Sierra Leone, Madame Fatima Maada Bio, who served as valedictorian, to celebrate their work and achievements and to encourage them to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. That event was held in September under the auspices of the International Decade for People of African Descent. The true hidden value lies in eliminating the artificial barriers and distance as we work to cement those connections, thereby honouring the past, celebrating

the present and creating a new pathway for the future, one that is truly free and fair to all.

Ms. Al-Temimi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to participate in this debate on the commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. I thank the Secretary-General for his efforts in the preparation of his report (A/73/88) on this item, reflecting a wide range of measures and activities implemented over the past three years aimed at spreading knowledge of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

In view of the strong belief of the State of Qatar in the importance of protecting human freedom and dignity, regardless of racial, religious or other differences, we were among the sponsors of resolution 70/7, pursuant to which a commemorative memorial was established. We have also provided the necessary material and moral support for the establishment of that memorial, which reflects humankind's rejection of all forms of slavery and the humiliation of human beings. The memorial at the United Nations Headquarters stands tall in recognition of that.

I take this opportunity to commend the Permanent Memorial Committee, the Group of African States, the Caribbean Community and UNESCO for implementing the resolution pertaining to the establishment of the memorial in recognition of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We are honoured to be an active member of the Permanent Memorial Committee.

We meet today not only to commemorate the victims of slavery but also to learn from the lessons of the past. In that regard, I stress the importance of educating future generations about the causes of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, as well as about the dangers of racism and bigotry. This meeting also represents an opportunity to call for the implementation of measures against all forms of slavery in our contemporary world, particularly the phenomenon of trafficking in persons, which has become widespread all over the world.

In view of the important role played by education in instilling human values in future generations, the State of Qatar has adopted curricula that stress the importance of freedom and fighting slavery, while promoting the values of our tolerant Islamic religion, which prohibits slavery, and our tolerant cultural and social heritage in that regard.

In view of the strong belief of the State of Qatar in the importance of protecting and promoting human rights and as an active member of the Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking, we have supported the efforts of the international community to fight trafficking in persons and have taken part therein. We have also supported the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons since its adoption and facilitated the consultations regarding the Political declaration on the implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (resolution 72/1), adopted at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly held in September 2017. We have also enacted several legislative and executive measures against trafficking in persons at the national level, including the establishment of a national committee against trafficking in persons that is in charge of establishing and implementing a national plan to combat trafficking in persons. The State of Qatar has also been one of the largest contributors to the United Nations voluntary trust fund for victims of trafficking in persons since its inception.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the State of Qatar continues to implement resolution 70/7, particularly with respect to educating present and future generations about the lessons learned from slavery, its consequences and the transatlantic slave trade.

Mrs. Tripathi (India): I would like to thank the Secretary General for his report under agenda item 121 on the commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade (A/73/88).

The transatlantic slave trade, which lasted over 400 years, is undeniably one of the most tragic and inhumane chapters in recorded human history. It was the manifestation of greed and immoral pursuit for profit, coupled with an unbridled abuse of power exercised by the mighty over the weak, that forced millions from their homes to toil in faraway lands. It destroyed millions of lives over generations and changed the socioeconomic fabric of countries in Africa, South America and the Caribbean. The transatlantic slave trade was an instance of what an ungoverned and lawless globalization can lead to.

The uprooted African communities have contributed greatly to the local economies and influenced the arts, culture and life of societies where they now live. However, many of those communities continue to face the scars of deep-rooted racial discrimination

and oppression. Chronic poverty continues to persist in the economies that were deliberately designed to bring profit to the elite in faraway lands in a bygone era. It is therefore important to understand what the transatlantic slave trade and slavery meant so that we can draw lessons from our collective history.

It is in that context that we welcome and continue to support the various relevant activities and programmes undertaken by the Department of Public Information for education and awareness-raising about that dark phase in history and to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade in March every year, which honours the memory of the millions who suffered through that brutal system.

India and the Department of Public Information co-organized an exhibition two years back on the history of enslaved East Africans who were taken to India. Many of them rose to positions of military and political authority in India. The exhibition brings out the far greater social mobility experienced by those individuals in India.

UNESCO has also played a key role in organizing and linking programmes through the Slave Route project to spread understanding of the impact and consequences of the slave trade. With the abolition of slavery, the colonial Powers turned to using millions of Indian indentured labourers, at virtually no cost, to work on plantations across the world to perpetuate their economic domination. UNESCO's International Indentured Labour Route project is another significant effort to preserve the memory and lessons of that phase.

The International Decade of People of African Descent, which started in 2015, also provides an opportunity to showcase the most valuable contributions that the once-enslaved people and their descendants have made to the societies that forced them into bondage.

India is proud to have joined as one of the lead contributors to the fund for the permanent memorial in supporting the efforts of the Caribbean community, African nations and others, which led to the establishment of the permanent memorial, which is named the *Ark of Return*, at the United Nations. We deeply appreciate the leadership of Ambassador Rattray of Jamaica in that endeavour.

We firmly believe that we must continue to raise awareness about the transatlantic slave trade through education and outreach activities. We hope that wide participation in those events will lead to changed attitudes, with salutary consequences for our global society, so that we can avoid the recurrence of the past injustices.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*):
The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 121.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.