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Official Records

President: Ms. Espinosa Garcés. (Ecuador)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Agenda item 121 (continued)

Commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Today's meeting has been convened to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, in accordance with paragraph 6 of resolution 70/7, adopted on 4 November 2015.

Statement by the President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are chapters in the history of humankind that are so tragic that merely remembering them incites deep pain. At the same time, remembering is necessary to prevent, reconcile and, above all, not repeat the efforts of the past. Slavery is one of those tragic moments of our history. For three centuries, millions of human beings — men, women and children — were brutally ripped from their homes in Africa and bought and sold as objects, stripped of all dignity. Every one of those persons suffered the horrors of exploitation, violence and exclusion; their tragic consequences persist in our world today.

On this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade,

we pay tribute to the victims of that deeply abhorrent practice and to their resistance, courage and fortitude.

I would like to recall today in particular women slaves who, in addition to being subjected to interminable forced labour and terrible acts of violence, were also physically exploited in order to perpetuate the chain of the slave trade. Nevertheless, those women played a crucial role in maintaining the dignity of their communities. Many of them led insurrections and became active members of abolitionist movements, such as Harriet Tubman, who freed hundreds of slaves trapped in southern plantations in the United States and dedicated her entire life to that cause. Naming those abolitionist women is an act of justice and of reparation.

In December 2018, we marked the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document that heralded a new era of equality and freedom for all persons based on human dignity. Article 4 of the Declaration stipulates unequivocally that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude. However, for many people, that concept remains far from reality. It is estimated that more than 40 million people around the world are subjected to modern slavery. Seventy-one per cent of the victims of trafficking in persons are women and girls. That is not only alarming; it is unacceptable in the twenty-first century.

But it is not enough to decry this open wound of today's world; we must fight the structural causes that drive sexual and labour exploitation, domestic servitude and forced marriage among so many other inhumane forms of subjugation, such as racial discrimination and

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prejudice that classify and rank persons according to the colour of their skin.

Racism not only hinders the full development of persons of African descendant and persists as an affront to their dignity; it also robs societies of the chance to enjoy peaceful coexistence and genuine and inclusive development.

Every chance I have had to visit *The Ark of Return* monument has always been a profound and powerful experience. That beautiful and striking memorial is not only a reminder of the suffering wrought by human greed, but also a symbol of our collective promise, on behalf of all the peoples of the world, that we will not return to the past and that we will work tirelessly to ensure that this tragic chapter of human history is never repeated.

Raising awareness, education and critical reflection are crucially important. We must pay special attention to young generations, work with them and include them in initiatives to alert them to the dangers of racism, intolerance and social exclusion. In that regard, I would like to commend the choice of theme for this year's commemoration.

Not only have communities of African descent historically used art and creativity as tools for resistance and demanding justice, but they have also made extraordinary contributions to the history of art and the collective imagination and memory of their countries. Men and women of African descent — writers, filmmakers, painters, musicians and sculptors — have revolutionized and transformed the aesthetic imagination of the entire world.

As a poet, I do not doubt the transformative power of art and its potential to heal wounds, build bridges and rebuild social fabric. Art is, moreover, a change agent, promoting collective reflection and catalysing reform in political, social and economic systems. Many artists who fight racial discrimination, like many human rights defenders, are today the targets of hate speech and attacks. We have a political and moral responsibility not to abandon them.

I commend the various educational and cultural programmes and initiatives of the United Nations system, Member States and civil society to raise awareness about slavery and racism. We must also continue promoting the International Decade for People of African Descent and, of course, we must step up

our efforts to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which affords us a framework for action to close the gaps that continue to condemn persons and communities of African descent to marginalization.

In conclusion, I would like to quote a beautiful verse of writer Maya Angelou's iconic poem *Still I Rise* — an ode to the pride, resilience and hope of our brothers and sisters of African descent:

(spoke in English)

“Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise.
I rise.
I rise.”

(spoke in Spanish)

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade were among history's most appalling manifestations of human brutality. On this International Day of Remembrance we pay homage to the millions of African men, women and children who were denied their humanity and forced to endure abominable cruelty across centuries. The enslaved peoples from Africa were irrevocably harmed and, in many instances killed, by an institution that should never have existed.

However, they were far more than victims. Enslaved people struggled against a system that they knew was wrong. They resisted. On many occasions they sacrificed their lives for the cause of freedom and dignity. We therefore remember not just the domination of people against their will, but also the invincible spirit that led the oppressed to revolt.

We are inspired by their remarkable endurance, resilience and countless contributions to bettering our world. We need to tell the stories of those who stood up against their oppressors and recognize their righteous resistance, from Zumbi dos Palmares in Brazil to Queen Nanny of the Maroons in Jamaica, to Queen Nzinga of the Ndongo and the Matamba Kingdoms in present-day

Angola, to Harriet Tubman in the United States and so many more.

The theme of this year's observance is "Remember Slavery: The Power of the Arts for Justice". Since the time of the transatlantic slave trade, the arts have been used to confront slavery, empower enslaved communities and honour those who made freedom possible. Literature, music, poetry and other art forms have been vital tools in commemorating past struggles, highlighting ongoing injustices and celebrating the achievements of people of African descent.

Today the artists, writers and poets who are committed to the struggle for racial equality and empowerment should know we are with them. As we mark the International Day of Remembrance, let us resolve to carry their messages far and wide to fight racism, to combat xenophobia, to tackle discrimination, to end social and political marginalization and to uphold human dignity for one and all. Let us take a stand together against all forms of slavery, old and new, by raising awareness of the dangers of racism in our time and by ensuring justice and equal opportunities for all people of African descent today.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, and as indicated in my letter dated 15 March 2019, I would like to consult members with a view to inviting artist and Prince Claus Award Laureate Mr. Christopher Cozier of Trinidad and Tobago to make a keynote statement on this occasion.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Christopher Cozier to make a keynote statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided (decision 73/551).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the decision just taken, I now invite Mr. Christopher Cozier, artist and recipient of the Prince Claus Prize, to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Cozier: I would like to say good afternoon and to thank you, Madam President, for having invited me to share a few thoughts about this particular period in history. The General Assembly will have to excuse me as I am a little fuzzy today, having lost my glasses.

I thought I would talk a little bit about my work over the past year. I am an artist, so I do not have a lot of experience in making speeches or talking without images. I gave a talk last year at the Berlin Biennale addressing intransigent forms and itinerant weeds, and about looking at shifty things while shifting. I talked about actions that function between spaces, institutions, cultures and the various enclosures that artists navigate to tell of another's story. Often for the artist and the work to be made or to become useful, belonging to a fixed time-place or designated concern is required. In negotiating, these conditions of visibility unravel as a repeating performance of mutual deception, expediently a moment of exchange, with some change but no change. For the artist, it becomes an ongoing sequence of dodges on the field across many maps, unfolding and requiring constant dexterity.

What I am talking about is artists who come from a very particular history. People who come from the Caribbean with a history of slavery entered that space as property, negotiated into becoming subjects of various crowns of Europe, and are still in the process of evolving into citizens of potential republics. That journey requires a certain amount of dexterity, and a certain amount of movement. In a place like New York, where I am having this conversation, I think of the lantern laws of the nineteenth century under which formerly enslaved people or freed coloureds had to walk around with lanterns at night so that they could be seen. Those lantern laws were very similar to laws enacted in the Caribbean, in Port of Spain, in the early nineteenth century, where the Africans and free coloureds had to carry lights to be seen at night, because if they were not carrying lights, it could imply all kinds of things, such as them being up to something. That has really interesting implications in the context of the United States with regard to Black Lives Matter, many other issues and the ways people have to negotiate space.

I also want to talk a little bit about what that means in terms of commemoration. I think a lot about commemoration and one of the things that is really interesting is this notion of "assembly". Things like the Labour Day Parade in Brooklyn, the Notting Hill Parade in London, Caribana in Canada or recent developments in Rotterdam, and all of the political tension around those events, are actually acts of commemoration — ways in which people who come from a very particular history occupy space and celebrate. Very often when we think of commemoration about slavery we think

about objects and statues, but not about this spatial concept or the spaces that we can create. However, very often for people coming from narratives like my own in the Caribbean, the things that distinguish us are the things that happen between species, be they the song systems, the dance halls, the carnivals or the traditional religious practices. They do not happen in halls; they happen on the street, in alleyways, in yards. I myself run a space in Port of Spain that values creativity and tries to encourage people to adapt, play, collaborate, invent and improvise. I call it Alice Yard because it is simply a backyard, not an edifice or a large, dedicated, monumental space. Therefore, coming out of a history like slavery, which denies so much of what constitutes the human subject, it is very interesting that people very often operate in these spaces between spaces, and those are the spaces that say who they are.

Those acts of commemoration — the song systems of London or Jamaica, the carnival parades of Trinidad — are at times seen as just a party. People think participants are just having a good time. But the background story is the celebration of self and the kind of link between that celebration of the self and the communal celebration of others. These kinds of permeable and permissive spaces open up all kinds of possibility. That represents one of the influences that the history of slavery has had on the world.

For example, this weekend Holi, known as Phagwah in Trinidad, will take place out in Queens. It is an East Indian Hindu rite, but the fact that they want to do it in a public space in New York starts to talk about how they want to become visible. That act of creating visibility in the public domain, celebrating self and difference, is something that is very central to the journey from property to subject of the crown to citizen, whether it manifests itself in London, New York, Canada, Rotterdam or wherever. And, of course, we know there are similar kinds of things in the contexts of Africa, India and other parts of the world.

I am thinking about this because I write about art as well, and I was very fortunate in the early 1990s to interview one of the elder Caribbean artists who died in the late 1990s or early 2000s, Karl Broodhagen of Barbados. The funny thing is, he said he was from Barbados but he was actually born in Guyana; he migrated to Barbados, studied in London and travelled extensively in the Caribbean. In his studio he made busts of significant individuals, Caribbean people who had distinguished themselves — writers and thinkers.

Visiting his house felt like entering a zemi hut. Even though his work was conservative, and is rarely mentioned in narratives about art in the Caribbean, conceptually it said something very important about the right to be and the right to be an individual coming out of that particular history.

I wanted to talk a lot about how in the Caribbean there are essentially three major issues that shape our existence and how it has influenced others. We have the concept of the significant individual, which is the ultimate arrival, coming out of a history of being property. There is the right to assemble, to gather and celebrate freedom, which is inclusive — the big challenge in the Caribbean islands. We are small islands.

There was a popular Calypso in Trinidad this year that had a really interesting line in it, where the Calypsonian, Kerwin Du Bois, said, “I come from a housing scheme with a big, big dream”. I thought that line really interesting because it really exemplifies something about the Caribbean consciousness. How did this small place — with perhaps 6 million English-speaking people and maybe 20 or 30 million Spanish-speakers — create all these writers and all these musicians rising above, and how did those people have such influence in the African continent?

I recently attended a seminar in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, where there were conversations about African thought and African possibility in which I was really struck by the influence of people going all the way back to Henry Sylvester Williams, who came from Trinidad in the late nineteenth century, and was radicalized by an African prince in exile in Trinidad from Ghana in the mid-nineteenth century. Williams was the first black man to be called to the bar of Cape Town, in the nineteenth century. He died in London around 1911. But he coined the term Pan-Africanism and influenced people such as Garvey.

Therefore, I think moving across space is very important. Moving between estates, States, nations, plantations is one very important aspect of the Caribbean presence. Where does the Caribbean begin or end as a consequence of that history? Does it do so in Europe, in the Caribbean or in the United States, where these populations settle and move?

I also think about the fascinating individuals from Glissant to James and others.

And then, of course, there is this sense that we think slavery is forgotten, but then when we see these assemblies, we are looking at the celebration of freedom as well as a celebration of these significant individuals who have had an impact on other societies.

I am therefore going to end my talk by saying simply that coming from that history, working on the projects that I have worked on, has given me a certain mindfulness and empathy. The major challenge for us now as societies — as small societies — is to consider how to stay on track with the influence that we have instigated by fighting our way through that history around issues of religion, religious diversity, gender, sexuality and others — such questions as, “How can we become interesting places?” We are really small and indeed we can become sanctuaries and safe spaces for the human imagination, which is our ultimate resource.

We began as bodies for sale to be transplanted in an industrial labour camp of Europe, but maybe we can become something else in this moment and celebrate ourselves and our potential. That is all I have to say.

The President: I thank Mr. Crozier for his first-hand statement and for his presence with us here today. *(spoke in Spanish)*

I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Muhammad Bande (Nigeria): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States in my capacity as its Chair for the month of March.

I wish to extend our sincere gratitude to the Steering Committee, with membership drawn from Member States belonging to the Caribbean Community and the African Union, as well as UNESCO and the Department of Global Communications for the activities marking the Remember Slavery programme.

It is also an honour to acknowledge the keynote speaker, Mr. Christopher Cozier, an artist from Trinidad and Tobago, who shed light on how the arts can serve as media for promoting freedom and social justice.

We are gathered here on the day established by resolution 62/122 of 2007 to honour the memory of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, some of the greatest tragedies in the history of humankind in terms of scale and duration. In doing so we raise awareness of the dangers of racism and

prejudice today. It is therefore instructive that the theme for this year, “Remember Slavery: Power of the Arts for Justice”, draws attention to the many examples of artistic expression, including memorials, music, dance and architecture, that have helped us to remember the history and consequences of the transatlantic slave trade.

How can one forget the melodies of jazz and blues that took the world by storm; the heart-moving voices of gospel music, which is a freedom cry to the Creator; the voices of slaves singing in unison while picking cotton to keep hope alive; or the Afro-Caribbean beats, which now form part of our common human heritage? Since the time of the transatlantic slave trade, the arts have been used to confront slavery, empower enslaved communities and honour those who made freedom possible or deepened that freedom. The contributions of people of African descent to the arts has been exemplary, thereby promoting reflection and invoking conversations that encourage tolerance. That continues to this day.

It is indeed important to mention that the permanent memorial at United Nations Headquarters entitled *The Ark of Return* is dedicated to the millions of African victims of the transatlantic slave trade, urging us all to acknowledge the tragedy and consider its legacy, lest we forget. Unveiled on 25 March 2015, *The Ark of Return*, designed by Rodney Leon, a United States architect of Haitian descent, is a symbolic illustration of the horrendous Middle Passage of enslaved Africans.

In recognition of the four-hundredth anniversary of the transatlantic slave trade, the African Union (AU) Heads of State and Government, at their most recent Assembly, held in February, recalled the depredations and evils of the transatlantic slave trade, its dispossession, discrimination and dehumanization, and its industrialization of racism. They also recalled the strong spirit of resistance to the slave trade and reaffirmed their commitment to the unity of African people, building an integrated Africa, as well as forging strong cultural, political, social and economic linkages that will further the pan-African dream among all peoples of African descent. In addition, the African leaders urged people of African descent to make 2019 a year of reconnection and re-engagement with their African identities and collective interests, as well as to forge practical and ambitious initiatives that would build unity and offer prosperity to the people of Africa, both on the continent and in the diaspora.

Accordingly, several activities have been planned by the diaspora and the African Union throughout the year celebrating the year of our return with initiatives such as the “Door of Return”. The AU places special emphasis on the diaspora and its contribution to the development of Africa. It also pays tribute to the role of the civil rights movement in the United States in shaping the continent in the struggle for liberation and independence during the early 1960s, when the founding fathers of African unity set forth to create the union.

The objective of the “Door of Return” initiative, spearheaded by Ghana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, is to advance African economic development in the areas of tourism, infrastructure and renewable energy. Accordingly, monuments are being built as symbols of Africa’s openness to the diaspora. The first of many such “Door of Return” monuments was erected by Nigeria on 24 August, 2017, as part of the diaspora festival in Badagry, Nigeria.

We must heed the words of Marcus Garvey, who admonished: “Up, you mighty race, accomplish what you will!” The year 2019 should be a galvanizing moment for the philosophical, historical, spiritual and cultural backdrop that will propel a surge of energy and lead people of African descent to reconnect with mother Africa, and vice versa. There is no doubt that a decade of return must begin as we replace the door of no return with the door of our — this time, voluntary — return.

We must all work together to make 2019 a milestone in the history of Africans, and therefore in the history of the world, as Africa is but a part of this exciting world. In honouring all those who, through their struggles and triumphs, victories and pain, brought changes and revolutionized society, we stand strong against all forms of slavery, racism and discrimination.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tonga, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Tōnē (Tonga): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this plenary meeting to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, with its theme for this year, “Remember Slavery: The Power of the Arts for Justice”.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Group of Asia-Pacific States as Chair for the month of March.

We acknowledge the presence of Mr. Christopher Cozier, artist, writer and curator, of Trinidad and Tobago, as our keynote speaker today.

In commemorating, on 25 March each year, the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery, we remember those who suffered and died during the transatlantic slave trade, which lasted four centuries.

In accordance with resolution 70/7, we recognize that too little is known about the transatlantic slave trade and we acknowledge the efforts made to raise public awareness on the subject. The Secretary-General’s 2018 report (A/73/88), entitled “Programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery”, aims to address that gap in knowledge and appreciation by raising awareness of the transatlantic slave trade, racism and prejudice and their lasting consequences. The report appropriately describes the positive support of Member States to enhance public awareness. The permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade at the United Nations, *The Ark of Return*, serves as a reminder that slavery has no place in our world.

The theme for this year, “Remember Slavery: The Power of the Arts for Justice”, reflects how the arts have been used to confront slavery, empower enslaved communities and honour those who made freedom possible. The theme is illustrated in the exhibit on slavery in the United Nations Headquarters Visitors Lobby and describes the impact the transatlantic slave trade had on persons of African descent in New York during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the role that art played in their struggle for freedom. We encourage everyone to make some time to visit the lobby and immerse themselves in the power of the art on display. The transatlantic slave trade also laid the foundations for capitalism, generating immense wealth in Europe and America.

We acknowledge the contributions made by victims of the trade and their descendants to the world of literature, art, culture and other areas. We also note the very useful and timely public briefing entitled “The role of memorials in preserving history”, to be hosted by the Department of Global Communications on 28 March, which will bring together architects, curators and

experts of African and Caribbean heritage to discuss how best to preserve, promote and manage sites of memory, such as the Gorée Memorial in Senegal and the Mémorial ACTe in Guadeloupe.

We acknowledge and welcome once again the theme — “People of African descent: recognition, justice and development”, of the International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015-2024, proclaimed by the General Assembly, among its objectives being to promote greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies.

We conclude by standing together with the international community in commemorating this important year through the power of the arts for justice, which are achievements that we all celebrate. We commend the efforts made by Member States, civil society and other stakeholders in promoting awareness of the transatlantic slavery and of how slavery has shaped so many nations through the power of the arts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Montenegro, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mrs. Pejanović Đurišić (Montenegro): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of the Eastern European States.

The transatlantic slave trade, which lasted for over 400 years, is one of the darkest chapters in human history, a horrendous crime that claimed more than 15 million men, women and children as victims. Today, on the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we remember those who suffered and died at the hands of the brutal slavery system, while considering the legacy of slavery and raising awareness about the dangers of slavery and associated phenomena, such as racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination.

The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade was one of the historic victories in the process of upholding the values of universal human rights, democracy and free societies. However, slavery has taken on modern forms and unfortunately remains a reality for millions of victims of human trafficking and forced labour around the world.

We must therefore intensify our joint efforts to fully and effectively implement the International

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols, the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, and other relevant United Nations documents to safeguard the fundamental freedoms of human beings worldwide and protect the victims of human trafficking.

We should also reaffirm our commitments to implementing the Durban Declaration of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, aimed at countering the legacy of slavery and contributing to the restoration of the dignity of the victims of slavery and the slave trade.

The dark history of slavery should be remembered in order to reaffirm the values of human freedom and dignity and to build the culture of tolerance, respect and mutual understanding among peoples. Disseminating knowledge about the risks of racism and discrimination is essential to building a world based on respect for international law, where every individual enjoys human dignity and lives free from fear and humiliation.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of San Marino, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Beleffi (San Marino): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

For centuries, millions of Africans were submitted to a regime of shameful exploitation. The transatlantic slave trade inflicted death and horrific suffering on millions of men, women and children who were deported from their lands and families and deprived of their freedom, their voices and their dignity.

We gather here today to honour all the victims of slavery because that tragedy has to be inscribed in the memory of all people to make sure that that dark and inhumane chapter of human history will never be repeated. Indeed, we must illustrate for younger generations the tragedy that occurred, its roots and its consequences. In that regard, we commend the educational programmes and awareness-raising

initiatives carried out by the United Nations system, Governments and civil society.

We believe that it is equally important to remember the courageous and noble acts of resistance carried out by the victims of slavery and to disseminate their legacy and their descendants' contributions throughout the world. But we shall not forget that the descendants of slavery still have to face injustices in their daily lives. We must therefore raise awareness today about the dangers of racism, discrimination and prejudice. Only by doing so will we build more inclusive societies for all.

This year's theme, "Remember Slavery: The Power of the Arts for Justice", reminds us of the incredible power of the arts to call for justice and change. Since the time of the transatlantic slave trade, the arts have been used to confront slavery and empower enslaved communities. Artists, through different art forms, continue to tell us the story of slavery and celebrate the legacy of victims' descendants. Even more than that, they convey to us the scars that that tragedy left behind and continues to inflict. Artists, with their creations in visual arts, poetry, music and dance, go beyond archives, allowing us to see, feel and touch directly the roots and consequences of slavery.

The arts play a very important role indeed in revealing the latent traces of history in our contemporary society and tackling today's inequalities and injustices, as well as in inspiring and calling on all of us to achieve a fairer and more equal world. The exhibition currently on display in the United Nations Visitors Lobby, "From Africa to the New World: Slavery in New York", shows the impact of the slave trade in this very city. Through portrait drawings, engravings, illustrations and other forms of art, we learn of the journey of slaves from Africa to the New World and the hardships they endured, but also of their resistance and their fight for freedom.

Despite our commitment and the various international instruments that prohibit slavery, we still witness today forms of servitude and slavery-like conditions. In line with international instruments and in the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals, including their targets 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2, we must raise our voices against these practices and act accordingly in order to put an end to slavery in all its forms.

The permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade here at the

United Nations is a reminder of the tragedy that occurred and a warning to fight against racism today. We are gathered here today because we need to remember and remain vigilant, raise our voices against injustice and fight against such abuses; because we want to honour the victims of slavery; and because we have committed to stand up against racism, prejudice and all forms of slavery.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. Paláu-Hernández (United States of America): On this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade we recognize the power of the arts for justice. We recall that, since the time of the transatlantic slave trade, the arts have confronted slavery, empowered enslaved communities and honoured those who fought for freedom. The arts have provided a vital platform for commemorating past struggles, highlighting ongoing injustices and celebrating the achievements of people of African descent.

The United States has a long and painful history with respect to slavery. President Lincoln once wrote: "I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." And yet it took the bloodshed of the Civil War for our country to rid itself of that shameful practice.

Despite the horrors they faced, the enslaved peoples in the United States made courageous efforts to express themselves through art. Their creativity and ingenuity rose above the depravity of slave ownership and left an invaluable impact on the arts, such as through Gospel songs, many of which were based on traditional African melodies.

In the aftermath of the transatlantic trade, great American writers have helped our nation confront the sins of the past with an eye towards justice. In her famous poem, "Still I Rise", Maya Angelou wrote about the pain of slavery and of being "the dream and the hope of the slave":

"Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
[...]
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.”

Toni Morrison, the first African-American to win the Nobel Prize in literature, is the daughter of sharecroppers and the granddaughter of an Alabama slave. In her novel *Beloved*, which she dedicated to the 60 million and more Africans and their descendants who died in the transatlantic slave trade, Morrison wrote about the stark horrors of slavery and the scars, both physical and emotional, that it left behind.

Let me take this opportunity to reaffirm the right to freedom of expression and to enjoyment of the arts as proclaimed in article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Artistic and creative expression are not only integral elements of the human spirit but also invaluable tools in the pursuit of justice, reconciliation and enduring progress.

When we read about the brutality suffered by so many slaves, listen to the music they created or view artwork depicting the sale of fellow human beings, we are reminded of the depravity to which humankind can succumb if we do not take it upon ourselves each and every day to struggle for justice and human rights for all. Today we recommit ourselves to struggling together towards that end.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guyana, who will speak on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

Mr. Ten-Pow (Guyana): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), for whom this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade resonates deeply. The vast majority of our member States — from Haiti, Jamaica and the Bahamas in the north, through the arc of the Lesser Antilles, to Guyana and Suriname on the South American mainland — are peopled by the descendants of the 15 million African slaves who were uprooted from their families and communities, endured the harrowing voyage of the Middle Passage and were brought to the Americas in shackles and chains to live a life of hard labour, deprived of the most basic of human freedoms, of their language, culture and religion, and indeed of their humanity.

Yet even in those dark days of the slave trade that provided the labour on the West Indian sugar plantations — the labour that produced the wealth that built the shining cities of the slave traders and slave

owners — the spark of human freedom was kept alive and spread across the barriers of language and of tribe and across all the other artificial barriers created to keep the slaves divided.

At intervals across the centuries of slavery in the West Indies, the flame of freedom and the spirit of rebellion erupted as it did in Haiti, under Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who defeated the armies of Napoleon, and in Guyana, under Cuffy and Akara, West African slaves who led their people out of chains and created, for a fleeting moment, a free republic on the land to which they had been brought. That flame of freedom came to be symbolized in the communities of escaped slaves — the Maroons of Jamaica and the Bush Negroes of Suriname — whose resistance won them freedom from oppression and continues to inspire us today.

Fast forward two centuries and we have today a Caribbean of free nations that is a model of tolerance and diversity, of people of different ethnicities, languages and religions living together in peace and harmony. The African slaves and their descendants were joined by Indians from northern India, Chinese from Fujian and Guangdong provinces in China, Portuguese from Madeira and later by migrants from the Middle East and other parts of the world, so that today the Caribbean is a melting pot with a distinct and captivating culture that has helped make the region one of the world's top tourist destinations.

The Caribbean melting pot sits astride the crossroads between North and South America and between Europe and Africa, on the other side of the Atlantic. We have transcended the bitter legacy of slavery and created for the world an example of tolerance, moderation and respect for diversity that often serves as a bridge to bring our global community together on the great issues on today's global agenda that too often divide us.

Out of nothing, we have created the reggae rhythms so magisterially personified in the lyrics of the iconic Bob Marley, and which UNESCO last month designated part of the intangible cultural heritage of humankind. Out of discarded oil drums, we have given the world the enchanting sounds of the steel pan, the only completely new musical instrument invented in the twentieth century. Our distinctive cuisine is a fusion of the great culinary traditions of the world, including the cuisine of our indigenous peoples from our mainland member

States of Guyana, Suriname and Belize and across the region.

Our peoples have distinguished themselves in politics, in the arts and sciences as well as in the struggles for freedom waged beyond the confines of the Caribbean. One CARICOM member State alone, Saint Lucia, population 180,000 — the same as Providence, Rhode Island, or Yonkers, in Westchester — has produced two Nobel Prize winners, Sir Derek Walcott for literature and Sir Arthur Lewis for economics.

As we observe this Day of Remembrance we remember not only the famous descendants of slaves whose names history has recorded — Barbadian Sir Garfield Sobers, the greatest cricketer in the history of the game; Colin Powell, son of Jamaican immigrants, who, as United States Secretary of State, was no stranger to this Hall in which we are now gathered; V. S. Naipaul, a native of Trinidad and Tobago, who before his death last year was regarded by many as the finest living writer of English prose.

We also remember, however, the countless nameless African slaves who lived and died in servitude in the West Indies. We pray that their memory will inspire us to continue to fight for respect for the dignity of the human person, respect for the human rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so that we can give real meaning to the lofty words of the Declaration, not only in the Caribbean but in every far-flung corner of the world where the inherent dignity of the human person is disrespected.

According to the International Labour Organization, over 40 million people, more than two-thirds of them women and girls, are subject to modern slavery in all its contemporary forms, including human trafficking, sexual slavery and domestic servitude. We must continue and increase our efforts to ensure greater compliance, including by the private sector, with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights implementing the United Nations Protect, Respect and Remedy framework, which are aimed at preventing modern forms of slavery in the workplace. Continuing and increasing our efforts to rid the world of all contemporary forms of slavery and to recognize the inherent dignity of the human person and our common humanity would be a meaningful and fitting way to honour the memory of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade.

There are also concrete actions that can be taken. In 2013, the Caribbean Heads of Government established the CARICOM Reparations Commission, with a mandate to prepare the case for reparatory justice for the region's indigenous communities and communities of African descent who are the victims of crimes against humanity, including genocide, slavery and slave trading. That mandate is being carried out through the CARICOM Reparations Justice Programme, which asserts that the victims of those crimes and their descendants have a legal right to reparatory justice. Compensatory justice for their descendants would also be a fitting way to honour the memory of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade.

Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to express our gratitude to you, Madam President, for convening this plenary meeting to pay tribute to the victims of one of the saddest and most ignominious chapters in the history of humankind: slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The roots of the dynamics of social and economic inequality, hatred, fanaticism, racism and prejudice that affect people of African descent to this very day can be traced back to the slave trade and the terrible legacy of slavery.

At the World Conference Against Racism, held in Durban in 2001, which recognized that slavery and the transatlantic slave trade would today qualify as crimes against humanity, the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, said:

“The inhumane exploitation perpetrated against the peoples of three continents, including Asia, marked forever the destiny and lives of over 4.5 billion people living in third-world countries, where poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, disease and infant-mortality rates, as well as life prospects and other calamities — impossible to summarize in a few words — are alarming and horrifying. These are today's victims of an atrocity that lasted centuries and they are clearly entitled to compensation for the horrendous crimes perpetrated against their ancestors and peoples.”

Reparations and full compensation for the peoples and groups affected by a crime as horrendous as it is imprescriptible are an unavoidable moral duty. In that regard, Cuba supports the just request made by the States members of the Caribbean Community. It would be fair to expect special and differential treatment for

developing countries, particularly those in Africa, in terms of their international economic relations.

Developed countries and their consumer societies, responsible for the accelerated and almost unstoppable destruction of the environment, have been the great beneficiaries of conquest and colonization, of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, of the ruthless exploitation and extermination of hundreds of millions of children of the peoples of the South. They have also enriched themselves through the unjust economic order they imposed on humankind and with the international financial institutions created exclusively by and for them as new forms of domination and subjugation. It is imperative to educate present and future generations about the causes, consequences and lessons of slavery to ensure that that period of human history is never repeated.

Approximately 1.3 million Africans arrived on our island as a result of cruel trade, mostly from the sub-Saharan part of the African continent. The arrival in Cuba of Lucumis, Carabalis, Congos, Gangas, Minas, Bibis, Yorubas and other ethnic groups had an immediate impact on the colonial society of the time, which after a complex process of transculturation gave rise to the Cuban nationality, which, in its essence, is a mixture of the Hispanic and the African.

My country is extremely proud of its African roots, which are present in our idiosyncrasies and in our cultural manifestations. In the different stages of the wars that allowed the Cuban people to exercise their self-determination, the freed slaves and their descendants were the main actors. Despite the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on it, Cuba will continue its cooperation programmes with African, Caribbean and other developing nations, as part of the joint effort to reverse the consequences of the slave trade and other sad chapters of capitalism in its colonial and neocolonial phases and its transnational financial domination.

Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade are among the most serious crimes against humanity that have not been properly addressed or had their consequences in today's society duly recognized. We reaffirm the importance of strengthening the activities of the United Nations and such other international organizations as UNESCO in that area. It is the least the international community can do to redress the crime against humanity

committed through slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

Mr. Amayo (Kenya): Allow me to begin by thanking you, Madam President, for convening today's important meeting. Kenya joins the international community in commemorating the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, whose theme this year is "Remember Slavery: The Power of the Arts for Justice".

This meeting is being convened just a few weeks after a historic meeting of world leaders on the African renaissance, held in Addis Ababa on 10 February as part of celebrations to mark the four hundredth anniversary of the transatlantic slave trade. The breakfast meeting held on the margins of the thirty-second African Union Heads of State and Government Summit, as already referred to by my able colleague, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad Bande of Nigeria, Chair of the Group of African States for the month of March, sought to inspire a global conversation geared towards reconciliation, re-engagement and reconnection of all Africans and their descendants across the world.

During the Addis Ababa meeting, His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya rightly observed that slavery had largely laid the grounds for colonialism, discrimination and racism. It undermined families and nations and introduced the damaging and false hierarchy of racial superiority and inferiority that continues to afflict humankind. Our recognition of the International Day of Remembrance is not only aimed at raising awareness about contemporary forms of slavery, such as trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, forced labour, the worst forms of child labour and early and forced marriage, but also represents an opportunity to strengthen our collective resolve to drive that scourge against humankind from the face of the Earth.

It has been horrifying to read in recent media reports that in the twenty-first century there are still millions who are victims of forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriages and human trafficking. We have heard accounts of slave markets, where, in particular, African migrants, who are relatively vulnerable and fleeing conflict zones as they try to seek a better life beyond the Mediterranean, end up being sold at slave auctions. That human indignity should be unreservedly condemned. We should therefore commit to working with the international community to curtail that

despicable trade in human beings wherever it occurs across the globe.

In conclusion, the United Nations system, along with Member States, should continue to publicize, educate and inform our citizens of the existence and different forms of modern-day slavery and its consequences, especially for the most vulnerable groups, and of its dehumanizing impact on the entire human race. We encourage all countries to take the necessary measures within their borders to identify and eliminate that abhorrent practice.

Mr. Castañeda Solares (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to express my appreciation to Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the General Assembly, for holding this plenary meeting in commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

For more than 400 years, more than 15 million men, women and children were victims of the shameful transatlantic slave trade, one of the darkest chapters in human history. Each year, on 25 March, we commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which is an opportunity to remember those who suffered and died at the hands of such a brutal system of domination. It is therefore necessary to remember the magnitude of such sad and tragic behaviour in order to recognize the dangers of racism and prejudice as evidenced in the current world situation.

My delegation has actively participated in efforts to ensure that the pernicious and serious effects of slavery are rectified. We have also duly supported such efforts through small but high-impact events, which to date have been part of this commemoration, including the proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015-2024, and the adoption of an ambitious programme of activities. We therefore encourage both Member States and the Secretariat to redouble their efforts to continue working in the spirit of recognition, justice and development for all.

We must not forget the crimes and nightmarish repercussions that that vile traffic inflicted on different regions of the world over several centuries. The victims of slavery fought against a legal system that they knew was wrong and unfair, but they always clung to the hope of achieving freedom. That is why we must significantly guarantee that the sacrifices lived by

each victim of slavery are recognized and translated into opportunities that can transform the reality faced by their descendants, who populate and enrich the different regions of the planet, bringing diversity and the vital force that strengthens our peoples.

In Guatemala, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean, the effects of slavery had an indelible impact on our societies. On the one hand, we have an ethnic and cultural diversity that translates into invaluable human capital. On the other hand, however, we have entrenched social stratification that originated during the colonial era, when indigenous peoples and slaves were exploited. In my country today we are working towards a free and pluralistic society in which all people enjoy equal rights and the prospects and gains of development are not conditioned by skin colour or racial or ethnic origin. We strive for a fully inclusive and peaceful society in which all citizens can progress and have equal opportunities and thereby contribute to that progress.

Approximately 200 million people who identify themselves as persons of African descent live in the Americas, and many millions more live in other parts of the world, many of them outside the African continent. Whether as descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, or more recently as migrants, they all constitute one of the poorest and most marginalized groups in society, facing limited access today to quality education, health services, housing and social welfare.

This meeting also provides a valuable opportunity to remember that migrants make positive and profound contributions to economic and social development in transit and destination countries. They can also help respond to demographic challenges, labour shortages and other challenges in host societies, while adding new skills and dynamism to their economies.

We must keep in mind that human beings must respect each other in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should not be feared or repressed but cherished as an asset for humankind. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations must be actively promoted. Our goal therefore must be to work to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, migration status, religion or any other condition or circumstance.

Countless human beings suffered the worst kind of suffering and no one knows how much blood was shed or how many horrors the victims of the ignominious and ruthless imperial colonial system suffered, but it is we who now know what to do to remedy those injustices and free our minds from prejudice as well as from ignorance.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting.

The Assembly has thus concluded the commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and this stage of its consideration of agenda item 121.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.