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President: Mr. Lykketoft (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 118 (continued)

Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held a debate on agenda item 118 and adopted resolution 70/7, entitled “Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade”, at its 46th plenary meeting, held on 4 November 2015.

Today’s event provides us an opportunity to honour the millions of women, men and children who were victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. It is a day to remember one of the darkest chapters in our past and to recommit ourselves to doing our part to prevent a repeat of this abhorrent historical fact. As we reflect on the past, we should continue to pay homage to the sacrifices of enslaved Africans and their descendants and recognize their respective contributions to our world and societies.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade focuses the world’s attention on the unprecedented horror of the slave trade, providing us with an opportunity

to collectively and solemnly reflect on the seemingly limitless scope of man’s inhumanity to man. While we reflect on the past horrors, we must also confront the current and modern challenges posed by the many forms and manifestations of slavery even today. All too many innocent people, including women and children, are suffering owing to the indignity resulting from human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Furthermore, instead of being at school, many children continue to be exploited as child labourers. The challenges of modern slavery and discrimination that confront us today include institutional racism, gender discrimination, social and economic inequality, hatred and prejudice.

The theme of this year’s remembrance is “Remember slavery: celebrating the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots”. This is a timely theme, as it draws attention to the vibrant African culture and traditions that have enriched life in societies once involved in the slave trade and how the African diaspora continues to enhance many aspects of daily life in countries around the world.

In 2007, the General Assembly adopted resolution 62/122 to create a permanent memorial to, and remembrance of, the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and to acknowledge the tragedy and enduring consequences of the enslavement of African peoples. I wish to congratulate and thank the Permanent Memorial Committee, led by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica, Mr. Courtenay Rattray, for its tireless efforts that led to the successful construction and unveiling last year of that permanent memorial. That memorial — the *Ark of Return* — occupies a

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prominent place at the United Nations and is crucial to educating and informing current and future generations about the causes, consequences and lessons of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. I also commend and recognize the invaluable contribution of the Caribbean Community and the States members of the Group of African States for their sustained commitment to this annual remembrance.

I call upon all Member States and people everywhere to do their part to fight for a world free of all forms and manifestations of modern slavery, including discrimination, oppression and racism.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson.

Mr. Eliasson: I thank you, Mr. President, for your powerful statement.

Each year the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade provides an opportunity to remember and reflect on one of the most appalling injustices in human history. On this day we honour the memory of millions of Africans forcibly removed from their families, their villages and their homelands over hundreds of years.

This important day also directs the spotlight on racism, which, sadly, still prevails in today's societies. It is seen in untold acts of violence, discrimination, bias and prejudice all over the world, and it is shamefully represented by the millions of people still living in situations of servitude and slavery worldwide. Forced labour, bonded labour, child labour, human trafficking and forced prostitution are serious human rights violations rooted in a glaring lack of respect and regard for fellow human beings. They are an affront to the Charter of the United Nations and its reaffirmation of the dignity and worth of the human person.

Just as we reject the vile human commerce embodied by the transatlantic slave trade, so must we reject, and pursue this struggle against, all forms of contemporary slavery. Our battle cry must be a life of dignity for all: enough is enough!

This year we celebrate the rich culture and heritage of the African diaspora. We remember its roots, traditions and impact on the life of societies involved in the slave trade. Africans brought to the New World the great diversity of their homeland cultures. As they forged new lives with one another, as well as with other

population groups, the rich varieties of diaspora culture took root and developed.

In that process, persistent efforts to strip Africans of their identity and culture failed. Instead, their vibrant and strong heritage endured and spread. We see Africans' legacy in the world in the bold art, in the vibrant music and in the inspired literature that infuse modern culture all over the world, and we very much see it in the contributions that the people of the African diaspora have made, and continue to make, in medicine and science, as well as in Government and leadership in society as a whole.

The trials and triumphs of the African diaspora also remind us of enduring qualities of human character: fortitude, courage, strength, tolerance, resilience, passion and compassion. Remember, nothing happens in life without passion; and the wrong things happen without compassion. Passion and compassion are therefore what we need to be reminded of in our constant struggle to improve conditions around the world.

Last year the United Nations launched the International Decade of People of African Descent. Much of the discrimination and marginalization of today can be traced to the slave trade. That is why the United Nations "Remember Slavery" programme is reaching out to young and old alike to create awareness, promote understanding and change attitudes. On this day, I ask all Member States and civil society to commit to ensure that all people of African descent enjoy equal access to education, employment, health care, development and other vital opportunities. It is long overdue for us to break the chains that have denied so many equality and the protection of their human rights under the law and in practice.

Outside this building in the Visitors Plaza, there is an iconic permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and I want to join the President in thanking those who made it happen. I particularly commend Ambassador Rattray of Jamaica for his untiring leadership and efforts. The *Ark of Return*, as it is called, is a poignant reminder of the indignity and suffering of millions of men, women and children victims of slavery. I urge everyone here today, every visitor to the United Nations and everyone who sees this webcast to stand in front of it and reflect on the capacity for both inhumanity and humanity that resides within us. I ask that we repeat to ourselves and others the words from the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights, which we all pledged to defend in 1948 and which is equally valid, important and relevant today. We need to make those words a reality. It states:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”;

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”;

“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude”.

Let us take those words and all the other commitments inherent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations as our guide for now and tomorrow, so that we may bequeath a more fair and just world to future generations.

The President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, I should like to consult members on inviting Ms. Sheila Walker, Executive Director of Afrodiaspora, Inc., to make a keynote statement on this occasion.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. Walker to make a keynote statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Walker.

Ms. Walker (Afrodiaspora, Inc.): We are here today to remember slavery and celebrate the heritage, culture and roots of the African diaspora. Most people do not want to remember slavery — some from feelings of guilt, others from feelings of shame. Most African diasporans do not want to remember slavery, when we think about the brutal treatment that our ancestors were subjected to. We prefer to forget slavery. To associate remembering slavery with celebrating seems very contradictory, unless we remember slavery differently, and unless we tell the story of the African diaspora in a way that indeed merits celebrating.

Current research makes such retelling not only possible, but even obligatory, if it is our intention to tell the truth about the Americas and the global African diaspora. Telling the story in new ways also fits with the mission of the “Remember Slavery” programme, which has as its mandate to educate people about the causes, consequences and lessons of the slave trade and slavery and raise awareness about the dangers of racism and

prejudice. Telling the story in new ways also fits with the first theme — recognition — of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent. Recognition is a necessary foundation for the other two themes of justice and development. The programme of activities for the implementation of the Decade states that those activities should lead to greater knowledge, recognition and respect for the history, heritage and culture of people of African descent through research and education, promote the full and accurate inclusion of the history and contribution of people of African descent in educational curriculums, and raise awareness by providing information.

The questions that immediately come to mind when we listen to those ideas concerning those activities are the following: what do we know and what do we not know about the history, heritage and culture of people of African descent? What are the implications of knowing and of not knowing for people of African descent and for others? What do we need to know in order to create respect for this history, heritage and culture?

Today’s International day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade should remind us of the foundational role that the enslavement of Africans in the Americas played in the creation of the modern world. It is also important, especially for the United Nations, to situate that Atlantic presence of people of African descent within the global African diaspora that reveals broader dimensions and implications. We should know, for example, the demographics of the Americas. Of the 6.5 million who crossed the Atlantic Ocean between 1500 and 1800, only 1 million came from Europe. Five and a half million people came from Africa; meaning that during 300 years of the 500-year history of the Americas, the overwhelming majority of the population of the Americas was of African origin. That is something that we need to know, and I suspect that most of us do not. The unremunerated labour of those enslaved Africans and their descendents enriched Europe and developed the Americas. Between 1650 and 1850, those Africans produced 75 per cent of the commodities traded in the Atlantic world, thereby fuelling the industrial revolution that created today’s economic system in which we all live.

It is therefore impossible to tell the story of the Americas without considering the roles and contributions of the majority of the population that laid its foundations. When industrialization replaced slave

labour in the 1800s, people of African descent received no compensation for centuries of unpaid work. In the British, French and Spanish empires in Brazil and in Washington, D.C., enslavers, however, were rewarded by their Governments with generous compensation from the loss of the income that they would no longer derive from the free labour of their former human property. In that way, the same people who for hundreds of years were enriched by the enslavement of people of African descent were further enriched by their slaves' emancipation.

It is generally assumed that the Africans who were enslaved were enslaved as just unskilled workers. Such a perspective makes absolutely no sense, given that Africans were brought across the Atlantic to create new societies in natural environments that were more familiar to them than they were to their enslavers. Some Africans were enslaved precisely because of their skills and knowledge, and they provided a transfer of technology from Africa to the Americas. People from what was called the Gold Coast, now Ghana, whom the Portuguese and Spanish called *negros minas* — or mine negroes — were selected for their expertise in gold mining and metallurgy. In Ecuador and Colombia, descendants of *negros minas* still pan gold and transform it into beautiful creations. African knowledge also helped to feed the Americas in Brazil, Jamaica, Suriname and the United States. Enslaved Africans planted rice, which had been domesticated 3,500 years ago in Mali, not in Asia. It was *Oryza glaberrima*, which is an African species of rice. Plantation owners in the United States asked slave-ship captains to bring them “rice negroes” known for their expertise in the grain's complex cultivation and preparation techniques. South Carolina became North America's richest plantation economy thanks to that African rice.

In addition to bringing systems of knowledge with them to the Americas, Africans maintained and recreated their cultures. Almost half of the Africans came from Angola, the Congos and Gabon — the Central African region over which the powerful Kongo Kingdom reigned for centuries. In the Americas today, Brazil's Congadas and Panama's Congos perpetuate memories of royal traditions from the Kongo Kingdom in their festivities. I had hoped to be able to show the Assembly images of those celebrations and continuities, but apparently that is not done in this kind of setting. Therefore, I hope there will be another occasion on which I can show members what I am telling them about.

Descendants of the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin, in West Africa, were concentrated in Brazil and Cuba. As a result, in Brazil and Cuba the spiritual beings of the Yoruba, which represent forces of nature, continue to be fed. In their celebrations, the descendants of the Yoruba dance, drum and sing as those forces of nature visit their human children.

Today there are about 200 million people of African descent living in all of the nations of the Americas, without exception, from Chile to Canada, including in unexpected places. In that regard, I would have shown members images of Afro-Bolivians and Afro-Argentines; maybe they have not seen them. The name of my favourite Bolivian is Juan Angola Maconde. There is therefore African culture every place in the Americas. The historical contributions of those Africans and the living traditions trace an African map of the Americas.

Beyond the Atlantic world, people of African origin also live across the Mediterranean Sea in Turkey, where descendants of Africans enslaved during the Ottoman Empire affirm their identity as Afro-Turks. In May the Feast of the Calf, which I attended a couple of years ago, will again be celebrated. Africans also travelled across the Indian Ocean, voluntarily as well as involuntarily. India has several totally distinct populations of African origin from different parts of Africa living in different parts of India, speaking different languages and writing in different ways. I do not need to tell the Assembly everything about them because, if members go out into the hall, they will see images of the tradition of elite Afro-Indians and Afro-Indian rulers.

Unlike the Americas, where there was no workforce and where Africans became the workforce, India needed no such workforce. Members will see, for example, Malik Ambar, who was an enslaved Ethiopian from the Harar district who went on to become a general and then ruler of Ahmednagar, near the Indian coast. Afro-Indians also built monuments. Members will see an image of the Sidi Saiyyed Mosque in Gujarat. They will see Janjira Island, from which Afro-Indians ruled a princely State and controlled maritime traffic on the Kangani coast.

There are also Africans who went to India voluntarily. One was Bava Gor, who was an agate merchant who transformed the technology of agate production. He also had spiritual powers that allowed him to defeat a demoness. A shrine was built in his

honour, and now both Sidis and many non-Sidis go there to worship him as an African saint. The Sidis play for him instruments of African origin, including the malunga, which is exactly the same as the berimbau in Brazil. As members can see, this African map transcends the Americas and links the cultures of the communities of the African diaspora across various oceans and continents.

A colleague and I made a documentary, entitled *Slave Routes: A Global Vision*, for the UNESCO Slave Route Project. It was shown here several years ago. I also showed it to a group of Afrodescendant adolescents in Brooklyn, and they had very interesting comments that went to the root of the problem raised in telling new stories and creating new narratives about slavery and the African diaspora. One student asked,

“Why haven’t we been told the whole story about African people? Like that we’re not just here in the United States but are all over the world? Not only throughout the Americas, but even in places we’d never think about, like India, where Africans were even rulers? Why don’t they teach us in school the kinds of things you showed us in this film?”

The next student said,

“Why haven’t we learned that some Africans were enslaved for how smart they were? Why were we taught that they were all dumb and did mindless work on plantations and got whipped by people who owned them? Who wants that as the only image of our ancestors?”

A third student added,

“Yeah, why doesn’t school teach us stuff that would make us proud of our ancestors, and make other people respect us? They only want us to learn stuff that makes us ashamed to be descendants of enslaved people. It’s like they’re hiding the good part of the truth.”

Whereas the programme of activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent recommends ensuring that textbooks and other educational materials reflect historical facts accurately as they relate to past tragedies and atrocities, the Brooklyn teenagers insisted that there was already too much focus on tragedies and atrocities and on victimization.

It is therefore indeed necessary to educate people about the horrors of the slave trade and slavery, because their consequences continue to determine and explain today’s prejudiced attitudes and racist behaviours. I am sure members can think of many of those. For educational materials to reflect historical facts accurately, they must also highlight the accomplishments and contributions of people of African descent in spite of the tragedies and atrocities. The Brooklyn students, and their peers elsewhere in the diaspora with whom I have spoken, want their schools to teach them more complete, truthful and empowering knowledge that will give them a sense of global citizenship. And they also want their education to offer them an honest narrative that will allow them to feel good about themselves and their heritage and inspire the esteem of others.

Raising awareness and creating respect for the history, heritage and culture of people of African descent by generating new research-based narratives and institutionalizing them in educational curriculums is a stated goal for the Remember Slavery Programme and for the Decade. Some of us are already deeply involved in shaping and sharing such new narratives, and are seeking committed and conscientious collaboration to further the process. I invite members to collaborate in remembering that, in spite of the slave trade and slavery, people of African descent and the global diaspora have made major contributions to civilization that merit celebrating because they have enriched us all.

Mr. Nduhuura (Uganda): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States. I represent His Excellency Mr. Tuvako Nathaniel Manongi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations, who is the Chair of the Group for the month of March.

Once again, around this time every year, we assemble to mark this day established by resolution 62/122 to honour the memory of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and to raise awareness of the dangers of racism and prejudice today. I wish to extend our gratitude to the steering committee, which counts the States members of the Caribbean Community and the African Group among its members, and the Department of Public Information for the planned activities and events for the Remember Slavery Programme.

The stories of heroism and determination and our common heritage as humankind are evident in the aspiring drama about Jesse Owens' fight to become a legend and take part in the 1936 Olympic Games, as portrayed in the movie entitled *Race*. One of the exhibits in the United Nations Visitor's Lobby, entitled "Africans in India: From Slaves to Generals and Rulers", is yet another inspiring piece. The populations mainly came from the East Africa region, including Ethiopia and the coastal areas extending from Dar es Salaam all the way to the Horn of Africa.

In that regard, once again we see a clear link between India and Africa. We have a shared history in trade, music, religion, arts and architecture, but the historical link between those two diverse regions is rarely discussed. Although many Africans travelled to India as slaves and traders, they eventually settled down in India to play an important role in India's history of kingdoms, conquests and wars. According to Sylviane A. Diouf of the Schomburg Center,

"Abyssinians, also known as Habshis in India, mostly came from the Horn of Africa to the subcontinent."

She goes on to say that

"Africans were successful in India because of their military prowess and administrative skills. African men were employed in very specialized jobs, as soldiers, palace guards or bodyguards. They were able to rise through the ranks, becoming generals, admirals and administrators."

The most celebrated of the powerful Ethiopian leaders in India was Malik Ambar, who lived between 1548 and 1626.

Why is it important to celebrate those linkages that exist in several parts of the world? It is important because wherever people of African descent went in captivity and slavery, they emerged victorious and contributed tremendously to the economy, art, culture, music and heritage of those who were their masters. We are all familiar with the slogan "hakuna Matata" in Kiswahili, which is a unique combination of roots drawn from Bantu languages, Portuguese, Hindi and Arabic. That is a concrete example of African roots.

The diaspora culture of the people of African descent is a mosaic that is reflected all over the world today. The Gullah, Maroon and Nova Scotia are peoples taken from the shores of Africa to the Americas, people

who fought and obtained their freedom. A significant example is that of the *Amistad* case, which unified and advanced the abolitionist movement in the United States. Today we have the permanent memorial on the grounds of the United Nations Headquarters. It is yet another ship, called the *Ark Of Return*, which marks the real and symbolic return of our people, their culture and heritage — to acknowledge the tragedy, consider the legacy, lest we forget: *asanteni sana*.

Mr. Anshor (Indonesia): It is indeed an honour for me to speak on behalf of the States members of the Asia-Pacific Group as its Chair for the month of March.

At the outset, I wish to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, in accordance with resolution 62/122, of 17 December 2007.

The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in history, resulting in the extensive exodus of Africans to many areas of the world from 1501 to 1830. As we remember those who suffered and died over that 400-year period, let us be reminded of the necessity to oppose any form of slavery in the modern world.

Various efforts have been made in recent years on this matter. One of them was the permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which was unveiled just last year and serves as a reminder of the legacy of the slave trade. More than that, it provides current and future generations with an understanding of the history and consequences of slavery, and represents a tool to raise awareness about the current dangers of racism, prejudice and the lingering consequences that continue to impact many communities around the world today. It also underlines the need for all countries to make a collective effort to mobilize all stakeholders to learn the lessons of the transatlantic slave trade and to communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice, which, unfortunately, still exist to this day.

Other valuable efforts have also been made at the national, regional and global levels in the fight against any kind of slavery. Nevertheless, this annual observance provides us with an avenue to remind ourselves of the importance of putting this fight on our list of priorities. We should not be complacent with regard to the normative frameworks we have put in place as a common reference; we have to continue

to strive for their realization in concrete policies and practices.

Fighting racism and racial discrimination means fighting poverty at the same time. Therefore, a stronger legal framework to improve policies and practices to deal with discrimination on any grounds is key. Concrete steps to encourage equal opportunity for all people, including people of African descent, should also be made in order to achieve sustainable development.

The theme of this year's observance focuses on the rich African culture and traditions that have impacted life in countries that were involved in the slave trade and where the members of the African diaspora continue to make major contributions in all aspects of life. Various activities have been held since last month to celebrate that legacy. It is our view that it is important to celebrate this legacy and treat it as a valuable tool to remind us, time and time again, of the strong and collective commitment of the international community to fight racial discrimination, bigotry and prejudice, as well as to learn from the courage and resilience of the unsung heroes of the transatlantic slave trade.

Finally, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, allow me to reiterate our steadfastness to fight all forms and manifestations of slavery, as well as our commitment to honour and celebrate the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots.

Ms. Mammadova (Azerbaijan): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Every year on this day, the United Nations honours and remembers the millions of people who suffered and died in slavery. We pay tribute to those who suffered the cruelty and injustice of the transatlantic slave trade, the largest forced migration in history, and lost their lives at the hands of the brutal slavery system that lasted over 400 years.

Last year, we witnessed the unveiling ceremony of the *Ark of Return*, the permanent memorial that now occupies a prominent place here at United Nations Headquarters. As a fitting contribution to honour the victims of slavery, the memorial serves as and will continue to be a powerful reminder of the unbearable hardship and death of millions of innocent people, a powerful reminder of the tragic legacy of the slave trade and the need to continue to fight racism and prejudice.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade also offers an opportunity to recall that slavery in its contemporary forms, such as trafficking in human beings, continues to exist in all parts of the world, and warrants increased attention from the international community. To that end, we, the Member States, undertake decisive concerted efforts, in particular through the implementation of international documents such as the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto and other relevant documents such as the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. We also commend the work of the United Nations system and its agencies and mechanisms in assisting States in countering such inhumane and shameful practices. In that context, education and awareness-raising are essential components of the fight against slavery and slavery-like practices. We welcome the various outreach activities and programmes organized by the Department of Public Information to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance in March of each year.

The International Decade for People of African Descent, which will continue until 2024, is another important vehicle for showcasing the valuable contributions that enslaved people and their descendants made to the societies that forced them into bondage. This year's thematic focus for the International Day and its commemoration, "Remember slavery: celebrating the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots", is aimed at highlighting the rich and diverse African culture and traditions that have influenced the whole world, and will do much to raise awareness of the cultural linkages among people of African descent throughout the world and of the African diaspora's contributions to society, including in the areas of culture, medicine, science, sport and spirituality.

In conclusion, the States members of the Eastern European Group join the entire international community in commemorating this important day, which celebrates the struggle and subsequent achievements of the people emancipated from the scourge of physical slavery. It is indeed a day of celebration, but it is also a day to take stock and to deepen our resolve to tackle contemporary challenges, combat modern forms of slavery and safeguard freedom and dignity for all. It goes without saying that the Eastern European Group remains committed to collaborating on that noble pursuit.

Mr. Webson (Antigua and Barbuda): I have the honour to speak this afternoon on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) on the observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This year the theme of the commemoration is “Remember slavery: celebrating the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots”.

The transatlantic slave trade constitutes one of the worst violations of human rights in our history. For almost a decade, the United Nations and the international community have set aside this time each year for the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade to honour all those who died as a result of slavery and to consider the causes, consequences and long-term impact of the slave trade on those who were enslaved and those who are still affected today, in order to ensure that this horrific abuse of humankind does not recur.

For more than 400 years, more than 15 million African men, women and children were victims of the transatlantic slave trade, one of the worst periods in the history of humankind. From 1501 to 1830, the largest forced migration, under some of the most inhumane conditions in recorded history, took place during the transatlantic slave trade, through which many were cast into forced labour. Those who survived that shameful horror were unloaded at ports throughout Latin America and the Caribbean into a life of forced labour and systematic cruelty. The developed countries and their riches were built on the backs and abuse of the violation of human rights that was forced African labour. The practice and its cost unquestionably represent a crime against humanity and should never be forgotten or allowed to raise their ugly heads again anywhere in the world, regardless of race, class or religion. This phenomenon should remain part of the previous chapters of our history, but it should never be forgotten.

Sadly, the reverberations of this unparalleled period for humankind were manifested not only in its victims at the time but, as we have already heard this afternoon, still emerge today in the emotional, mental and physical trauma and the other negative impacts that continue to affect people of African descent, the current generation and those as yet unborn, who will also feel the repercussions of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. As we strive to eliminate the racism and

prejudices that are direct results of the slave trade, we must be sure never to forget.

Those who were responsible for that crime still benefit the most. They are still the very same ones who today lay claim to leadership in our world, keep a strong hold on it and make the decisions in it. The struggle for full and absolute emancipation remains a continuing endeavour and priority, and is essential to the fight for full freedom. The brutality of chattel slavery forced on so many of a particular segment of humankind remains a burden and continues to be felt by all. The continued emotion resulting from that past is still to be seen in the fight against colonialism around the world. Many countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean region, are still colonized, and we continue to seek the fulfilment of the United Nations pledge of total freedom for all countries. Latin America and the Caribbean remain committed to that role of the Organization. Economic and social inequality persist, and a change in the social order in parts of the world must be enforced. In our region, we will continue to commit fully to the work of the United Nations in that regard. Indeed, many members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, including Antigua and Barbuda, are committed members of the Decolonization Committee and dedicated to its tasks.

The Latin American and the Caribbean region takes note of the important report (A/70/221) of the Secretary-General and of the achievements outlined therein. We are proud of, and pleased with, the announcement concerning the International Decade for People of African Descent. We also proudly appreciate the work of the committees that has enabled us to stand here in the Hall while outside we have a memorial we will never forget, and that will remind us of the atrocities of slavery forever. At the national level, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have undertaken significant initiatives aimed at celebrating the Decade. GRULAC is proud that many countries are sharing information, knowledge and experience about the legacy of the African people. The Group is particularly overjoyed by the permanent memorial created in remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade that is situated outside these walls, and will always revere it. It is a significant achievement whereby we can ensure that we will never forget.

In conclusion, GRULAC member States join the wider international community in observing this important day, which highlights the struggle and

subsequent achievements of the people who were emancipated from the curse of slavery. It is indeed a day to celebrate, but also a day for us to take stock and to cement our determination to confront today's challenges of inequality, poverty, colonialism and prejudice, all of them elements that still help to support the philosophy that holds one race superior and another inferior. That ideology must be discredited and abandoned, even in its most contemporary form.

We are a strong people and a rising people. We will continue to rise up from this unparalleled tragedy in the history of our planet. The liberation of the many African men, women and children who endured torment, torture and attempted dehumanization, and who fought against considerable odds to defeat slavery, will never be forgotten. The African people and people of African descent will stand together. While others may turn their heads away and attempt to forget, we will never allow this scourge to recur, or others to forget.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Today we honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, that shameful commerce that, beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing for several hundred years, exploited millions of human beings — men, women and children — by reducing them to cargo crammed aboard slave ships sailing for the Americas to be bought, sold and exchanged.

While slavery has existed at various periods and in various civilizations, the magnitude of the transatlantic slave trade made it a unique phenomenon in modern history. Its abolition, in 1807, marked the beginning of an important evolution that, truthfully, is still ongoing, because the ideology that justified slavery has not been completely eradicated. Racism and discrimination based on a belief in a hierarchy of race and skin colour are, sadly, still with us today, as we heard in the statements made in this Hall on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 18 March (see A/70/PV.88). And every year, thousands of people fall victim to modern forms of slavery and human trafficking.

The permanent memorial, the *Ark of Return*, erected last year at the Organization's Headquarters, is there to testify to the importance we all attach to ensuring that the blatant injustice that was the slave trade, and the atrocities that went with it, is not forgotten. The memorial's inauguration coincided with the proclamation of the International Decade for People

of African Descent, whose purpose is to protect and promote the rights of people of African descent and to acknowledge their heritage and the contribution they have made to enriching our cultures. This year's theme encourages us not only to reflect on those events but also to celebrate the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots, for the fact that despite the inhuman conditions in which slaves were transported from Africa to the Americas, despite the uprooting and repression they suffered for many generations, many of those brave men, women and children were able to preserve and develop their heritage, is a testament to their remarkable resilience.

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Their dances, singing and rhythms have enriched other cultures and produced, among other things, the gospel music, blues, jazz and rock that have accompanied the emancipation of generations of young people. Writers of African descent have enriched English, Spanish, Portuguese and French literature, and people of African descent have made contributions to the sciences, medicine and education that have benefited all of us. Despite being denied their most basic human rights, people of African descent have persevered. They have reclaimed their rights and reminded us of the true meaning of equality in dignity and rights. That is the message of hope we read in their destiny.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said that injustice anywhere was a threat to justice everywhere. Similarly, the injustices committed in the past against the dignity of slaves, and the discrimination that people of African descent may face today, constitute an injustice against humankind.

Ms. Butts (United States of America): Today we pay tribute to and honour the memory of the millions of women and men, girls and boys robbed of their fundamental freedoms and lives through the transatlantic slave trade. The horrors of slavery are a collective stain on our history. Families were destroyed, communities decimated and nations divided. The United States recognizes the enduring impact of slavery and the fact that we must work collectively to always remember its devastation, understand its truth and strive to heal its wounds.

President Obama recognized that in a recent speech given during his historic visit to Cuba, in which he noted our two countries' shared history of slavery,

both built in part by slaves from Africa, as well as of segregation and the continuing challenges of racial bias. But he also recognized the great strides that the United States has taken because of the openness of American democracy, which has enabled us to do better through the protest, debates and popular mobilization that laid the groundwork for a son of Africa and the African diaspora to become President of the United States.

Today we must also celebrate the wealth of the contributions that descendants of African slaves have made, and continue to make, in our lives. From the freed slaves who shared their stories through slave narratives, such as Harriet Jacobs, Solomon Northup and Nat Turner; to the leaders of the abolitionist movement — Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth; to the early educators and agitators against segregation and lynchings who paved the way for the modern civil rights movement, such as Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells; to leaders in the arts, sciences and sports — Elizabeth Catlett, Jackie Robinson, Gwendolyn Brooks, Charles Drew, Althea Gibson, Gordon Parks and Lorraine Hansberry, we have many people of African descent, past and present, to thank for making the United States a stronger and better nation.

The African-American poet June Jordan captured the spirit of determination for freedom and purpose in her “Poem for South African Women” in support of the freedom struggle of another people of African descent when she read it at the United Nations on 9 August 1978:

“And who will join this standing up
and the ones who stood without sweet company
will sing and sing
back into the mountains and
if necessary
even under the sea
we are the ones we have been waiting for”

Our reflection on this day would be incomplete if we failed to recognize the modern manifestation of the horror of slavery in the trafficking of women, men and children. We must be ever-vigilant and continue to confront and combat this lasting plague on the world. At a remove of more than 200 years from the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, we must do more to share this terrible chapter in human history and obliterate

its lasting impact. The United States is committed to doing its part and partnering with committed allies in commemorations such as today’s and that of the International Decade for Persons of African Descent, in order to deepen awareness and understanding. We pay our respects to all who suffered, by building memorials such as the *Ark of Return* — and here I would like to recognize the great work of Ambassador Rattray and the nations of the Caribbean Community and of Africa in leading that effort — as well as monuments such as the soon-to-be-opened Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, all of them visible reminders of the past as well as inspiration for the future.

As we also join together today to celebrate the culture and heritage of the African diaspora and the diversity and strength that it brings to the fabric of our nations, let us renew our commitment to doing even more to end discrimination and exploitation and to create a more just and inclusive world.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank the President, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for convening today’s commemorative meeting to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. I would also like to thank Ms. Sheila Walker, Executive Director of Afrodiaspora, Inc., for her keynote address, and other speakers before me for their moving insights on the significance of this day.

We commend the United Nations for holding a number of commemorative activities around the world aimed at furthering understanding of the causes, consequences and lessons of the slave trade. Approximately 200 million people of African descent live in the Americas. Many millions more live in other parts of the world outside the African continent. It is important to celebrate the African legacy in order to further underline the major contribution that people of African descent have made to our societies and to promote their full inclusion. The vibrant culture and traditions of Africa have enriched life in the countries that were once involved in the slave trade, and the African diaspora continues to enhance many aspects of daily life in countries around the world. The Durban process raised the visibility of people of African descent and helped to bring about substantive advances in the promotion and protection of their rights as a result of concrete actions on the part of States, the

United Nations, other international and regional bodies and civil society.

But despite those advances, racism and racial discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia, direct and indirect, de facto and de jure, continue to manifest themselves around the world. I am confident that the fifteenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action represents an important opportunity for States to recommit to those principles and take concrete steps towards them through the adoption and effective implementation of national and international legal frameworks, policies and programmes aimed at combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

This International Day is a sober reminder that many modern forms of slavery and long-established stereotypes and biases continue to prevail, all of them calling for strong concerted multilateral action. We should remember such historical tragedies every day of our lives as we advance through the twenty-first century, in each thought, word and deed, and not merely at commemorative observances.

Kazakhstan's national legislation condemns and forbids forced labour, genocide, racial segregation and apartheid, as well as all forms of racial discrimination or propaganda and agitation based on notions of racial, national and religious superiority, whether perpetrated by institutions or citizens. My country's various ethnic groups are engaged in nation-building alongside ethnic Kazakhs, and enjoy full civil and social status, not as national minorities but as citizens with all civil and political rights. Our ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity represents our precious wealth. We have succeeded in turning our historical inheritance of a multi-confessional society into a strategic advantage. With Government support, we have achieved public awareness of the importance of tolerance and harmony as the cornerstones of Kazakh society in the various languages of our different ethnic groups through the power of mass and social media and modern digital technology. Kazakhstan supports the creation of inclusive multiracial organizations and movements. We have a unique constitutional authority, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, for issues of inter-ethnic and cultural harmony. Our doctrine of national unity is aimed at strengthening mutual inter-ethnic respect.

Kazakhstan has contributed to the erection of the *Ark of Return* permanent memorial in honour of the

victims of slavery, since we consider the transatlantic slave trade to be one of the most tragic pages of human history, and one that still has lasting and damaging consequences for human rights and international law. The erosion of international law demands that we all reaffirm its cornerstone principles and commit ourselves to their preservation in order to overcome the challenges ahead. During the general debate of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, the President of Kazakhstan proposed the convening of a United Nations conference at the highest level in 2016 with the aim of reaffirming the basic principles of international law.

Kazakhstan intends to continue to make every effort for the benefit of dialogue among civilizations and always stands ready to combat all forms and manifestations of slavery, racism and related intolerance at all levels and throughout the world, as well as to honour and celebrate the heritage and culture of the African diaspora.

Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade are among the most serious crimes against humanity not to have been adequately studied or to have their consequences on today's society duly recognized. Tragedy and unspeakable horror were the fate of the approximately 15 to 20 million men, women and children whom the transatlantic slave trade uprooted from their homes and sent to the Americas as commercial cargo. They were treated inhumanely, unjustly and despicably.

Cuba attaches particular importance, and is particularly sensitive to, the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Cuba supported and co-sponsored resolution 61/19, which commemorated the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and designated the day we commemorate today.

As part of this cruel trade, approximately 1.3 million Africans were brought to the colonial plantations of Cuba. They were forcibly taken from their villages and families and sold as slave labour on the island. Freed slaves and their descendants have been major players in the various stages of the wars that enabled the Cuban people to exercise their self-determination.

Cuban identity was the result of a process of transculturation, with contributions from various ethnic groups in difficult environments — first colonial and then neocolonial. We are essentially a mixture of Hispanic and African. We also have influences from Asia and American indigenous peoples.

The Cuban people are extremely proud of their African roots, which are present in our character and our cultural manifestations. The Cuban culture and nationality emerged nourished by African heritage. Moreover, Cuba has also provided the sweat and blood of hundreds of thousands of its children to contribute to the emancipation of Africa, a continent to which all of humankind will eternally be indebted.

Much gold has been stained with the blood of the enslaved, much wealth produced from shame and indignity. The fate of the peoples of the third world was altered by exploitation on an immense scale, and it is those peoples who clearly deserve compensation for the horrendous crimes committed against their ancestors. The developed countries and their consumer societies, responsible for the accelerated and almost unstoppable destruction of the environment, have been the main beneficiaries of the conquest and colonization, slavery and transatlantic trade, the ruthless exploitation and extermination of hundreds of millions of children of the peoples of the South. They have become rich from the unjust economic order imposed on humankind and by the international financial institutions created exclusively by them and for them.

Cuba supports the request for compensation raised by the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Cuba also advocates the special and differential treatment required by developing countries, particularly in Africa, in their international economic relations. Cuba rejects the selfishness and the shameful opulence of the few, which serve as the models for ongoing globalization.

My country supports and co-sponsors the relevant draft resolution submitted each year by the member countries of CARICOM and the African Group. We recognize the importance of strengthening the activities of the United Nations and other international organizations such as UNESCO on this matter. That is the least the international community can do to repair the crime against humanity committed via the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans.

Mrs. Pobee (Ghana): I wish to begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation for the convening of this solemn commemorative meeting in observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It is fitting that we remember that dark era in the history of humankind, during which millions of Africans — women, men and children — were taken as slaves from the continent and transported from their homelands to destinations in Europe and the Americas in inhuman conditions and treated as commodities. It is also right that we honour the victims of slavery and those who opposed and triumphed over this crime. Their strength of will and resilience continue to inspire us today.

Mere remembrance without positive action does not make for progress or renewal. Therefore, the commemoration of the end of slavery should serve as a time for deep reflection as well as collective resolve and action to address the false ideologies and racial prejudices that gave rise to this heinous crime, and which continue to manifest themselves in racism, racial discrimination and intolerance, modern forms of slavery and exploitation in our world today. We therefore commend the efforts of the United Nations system to educate current and future generations about the contemporary consequences of this tragedy of human history.

Many visitors to Ghana's Cape Coast and Elmina Castles, which bear haunting memories of the heinous crime of slavery, have the opportunity to see the Door of No Return, from which slaves were put onto ships bound for the Americas. Today, we are gratified that a visitor to the United Nations will also have the opportunity to see the permanent memorial, named the *Ark of Return*, which seeks to remind us of this tragedy and to call us to action. That memorial has special meaning for all peoples of African descent and for the African diaspora, especially as we build bridges to turn this historical aberration into positive bonds of cooperation and cultural and socioeconomic development for our peoples.

In conclusion, I wish to express our appreciation for this event. I trust that the international community can give true meaning and substance to this act of remembrance by working together with resolve and commitment to fight against racism and prejudice, guided by our firm belief in the dignity and equality of all human beings and in accordance with the universal ideals enshrined in the Charter of our Organization.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): Slavery and the slave trade victimized over 15 million people. Spanning over 400 years, the transatlantic slave trade was the largest and most inhuman forced migration in recorded history. It was not an isolated incident, but part of a man-made system that connected Europe, Africa, the Americas and Asia. It cannot be dissociated from colonialism, which was instrumental in the establishment of the unjust social, economic and institutional cornerstones needed for the transatlantic slave trade to thrive.

The scourge of the slave trade was intrinsically international in its making, but it was also international in its undoing. The late eighteenth-century movements in favour of fundamental freedoms inspired a global abolitionist movement that, within a span of 100 years, transformed slavery from norm to exception, from a tolerated lucrative activity to one of ignominy.

Brazil was at the centre of this unfortunate chapter of world history. The country received the largest number of enslaved Africans. Only after an estimated 4 million people were forcibly brought to Brazil from Africa over three centuries was slavery finally abolished. Today, Brazil is home to the largest number of persons of African descent outside of Africa, a population of more than 100 million people, according to the 2010 national census, representing approximately 50 per cent of the Brazilian population. People of African descent marked the emergence of contemporary Brazilian culture in many different ways, from economy to religion, from language to cuisine, from sports to literature. It is an essential part of our historic formation and our national identity. At the same time, people of African descent continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, violence, lack of quality education and health care.

Brazil takes great pride in the foundational, human and cultural contributions that African descendants brought to our nation. Today it is no longer acceptable to ignore the urgent need to address persistent social and economic inequities. A wide range of targeted public

policies were established in the past decade. Affirmative action quotas were adopted in higher education and in the federal civil service, which is contributing to offering enhanced opportunity and has produced many successful role models. To redress the situation of young Brazilians of African descent, the Government designed a programme to reduce and prevent all forms of violence against African Brazilians, as well as to promote their social inclusion and empowerment. The emphasis of previous Brazilian Governments on tackling poverty and social exclusion has favoured Brazilians of African descent in particular. The Bolsa Família has reached the majority of Afro-Brazilians, and new legislation that protects the rights of domestic workers has translated into benefits for the majority of black women.

The recognition of the importance of African heritage in our very existence as a country has found expression in a number of concrete diplomatic actions. Brazil supported the International Decade for People of African Descent and its programme of activities, which we expect will contribute to the full implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and raise awareness with regard to combating prejudice, intolerance and racism. Brazil was also an early supporter of the initiative to erect, at a place of prominence at United Nations Headquarters, a permanent memorial in tribute to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and to strengthen our collective effort in the present to end racism.

The Acting President: 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.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to conclude the consideration of agenda item 118?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.