

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE OF THE
VICTIMS OF SLAVERY AND THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE
25 March 2009**

The swearing in of a son of Africa as President of the United States this year marked, for many, a milestone on an epic journey that began more than 400 years ago. Throughout the Americas and the Caribbean, the descendants of history's greatest forced migration have fought long and hard – and continue to fight – for justice, assimilation and respect.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade honours the millions of Africans violently removed from their homelands and cast into slavery. Estimates vary of how many millions of men and women were transported, but what is not in dispute is the legacy of this vile traffic. Africa has yet to recover from the ravages of the slave trade or the subsequent era of colonization. And, across the Atlantic, and in Europe and elsewhere, people of African descent still struggle daily against entrenched prejudice that keeps them disproportionately in poverty.

Despite the official abolition of slavery, racism still pollutes our world. So too do contemporary forms of slavery, including bonded servitude, forced prostitution, and the use of children in warfare and the international drug trade. It is essential that we speak out loud and clear against such abuses. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Failure to observe this fundamental principle leads directly to the inhumanity of slavery and the horror of genocide.

Speaking out is the theme of this year's observance. It asks us to “Break the Silence, Beat the Drum”. Since the dawn of humanity in Africa, drums have provided the pulse of our history, and they continue to help us celebrate our common humanity. Today I urge everyone, everywhere, to beat the drum to proclaim that black or white, man or woman, we are one people. When musicians play, they pay attention to each other while playing their own parts. We must follow their lead. We can achieve harmony only if we respect each other, rejoice in our diversity, and work together for our common goals.