

Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Official Opening of the Exhibit

'Women and Slavery: Telling Their Stories'

12 March 2015, Visitors Lobby, United Nations Secretariat

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Ms. Sherman-Peter
Permanent Observer of CARICOM to the United Nations

As the Permanent Observer of the Caribbean Community, it is an honour to participate in the opening of this exhibition. The names of the women to whom the exhibition pays tribute: Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Sanite Belair, are renowned in the fight against slavery, racism and racial discrimination. The UN's monumental decision to commemorate the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade calls us to remember slavery, and importantly, enables these stories of women and slavery to be told.

The 14 member states of CARICOM are representative of the African diaspora, arising from former slave societies in the Americas and the Caribbean. This exhibition affords the diaspora yet another vehicle to link hands with Africa, across the very ocean on which millions of our ancestors endured a tumultuous journey into a reprehensible slavery system. It urges the global community to remember, and specifically this year, to remember "*Women and Slavery*".

The stories of extraordinary women, taking decisive action, in extraordinary times, are the subjects of this exhibition. Surely they recognized that it might have been easier to accept their condition and the status quo. Instead, they were motivated by what was at stake for enslaved men and women of Africa and of African descent. Undaunted by personal risk, these strong and courageous women leaders and advocates dared to stand against slavery, and against prejudice, racism and racial discrimination.

The stories of these women are compelling. They tell of challenge the women presented to the premise that men and women were movable property, simply because of the colour of their skin. They tell of challenge to the premise that a woman's primary function was to breed, and that she had no control over her body; that she was obliged to work all day, often without hope for rest at night.

This is a pivotal year for the advancement of women and girls, and for gender equality around the world, a year that builds on a firm foundation. Some thirty-six years ago, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Four days ago, International Women's Day was celebrated around the world. The deliberations of the Commission on the Status of Women, now in its 59th Session, centres on the 20th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the landmark Beijing Conference.

High-level Representatives from CARICOM Member States joined their voices with others in the CSW, in recounting national successes, regional successes, and global successes, in the advancement of women and gender equality, over a broad range of areas including politics, the law, education and health. Ever forward-looking, the Representatives recounted plans to fill the gaps, for continued progress. They reminded of the imperative for men and boys to make the cause of women and girls their own, from households to places of work, from schools to parliaments.

Challenges remain; but today, we can see farther, we can see clearer, because we stand on the shoulders of women that defied the odds, to bring about change for all, in the midst of slavery and its aftermath. Until today, the action of the women portrayed in this exhibition are mirrored in civil rights and other movements, in efforts to end prejudice, racism and discrimination, and in the global push for women's rights as human rights.

We rightly pay tribute to these women, for they inspired many of the progressive stories the diaspora and world tell today; stories of the UN on the frontline of the struggle for women's advancement and gender equality; positive and progressive stories of remarkable accomplishments of women; and visions of a better future for women and girls, and for all humanity.

I thank you.