

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 Cristina Gallach

Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and Communications

Ambassador Missouri Sherman-Peter, Permanent Observer of the Caribbean Community to the United Nations;

Mrs. Louise Bailey, Senior Political Officer and Officer-in-Charge of the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations;

Professor Michele Mitchell of New York University;

Delegates to the Commission on the Status of Women;

Excellencies;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening, my name is Cristina Gallach and I am the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. I am honoured to welcome all of you today to the opening of this exhibit entitled "Women and Slavery: Telling Their Stories".

This exhibit is one of the first events to be organized for the 2015 annual observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As you know, the General Assembly in 2007 established the Remember Slavery Programme, managed by the Department of Public Information, to honour the memory of the victims of slavery and of the transatlantic slave trade. It also aims to raise awareness of the dangers of racism and prejudice today.

This year, thanks to the collective efforts of Member States, and my Department, we'll be unveiling here in New York, at United Nations Headquarters, a Permanent Memorial to the Victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, known as *The Ark of Return*. It will be held on Wednesday, 25 March, the International Day. I hope you will all join us.

The theme for this year's International Day is "Women and Slavery".

Historians estimate that women made up one third of the more than 15 million people who were sold as slaves. Not only did enslaved women endure the harsh conditions of forced labour, they suffered the added indignity of systemic sexual exploitation.

Many were raped by their owners and forced into prostitution. Almost all were forcibly separated from their children, who were sold to different slave owners.

Yet somehow, these remarkable women found the inner reserves and the strength to cope and to fight back against an inconceivably cruel and inhuman system.

They drew on their connection to each other, to their cultures and to the eternal human spirit that resides in all of us.

They transcended daily physical, emotional and psychological abuses to retain their dignity and create a sense of unity in their communities. Countless stories of women's heroism and valour in the face of unimaginable cruelty remain untold.

In this exhibit, you will learn about their stories.

Women like: Queen Nanny, who adopted guerrilla tactics in the early 1700s in Jamaica to fight colonial soldiers and organized a barter system to sustain her people.

Sojourner Truth, a freed slave and feminist, who used the legal system here in the state of New York, which had abolished slavery in 1827, to fight the abhorrent practice. She was among the first people to link the oppression of women with that of slaves.

This exhibit offers a glimpse into the lives of these women and others who helped to create the abolitionist movement.

Unfortunately, the oppression and sexual exploitation of women is still with us today in every part of the world and in all socio-economic classes. This is an issue that the UN takes very seriously, starting from the Secretary-General. Those of you who went to the march on International Women's Day this past Sunday may have seen him and many other UN staff there.

We hope all of you, men and women, will be inspired tonight by our exhibit. We hope you will learn the stories of some very remarkable women and their fight to establish a more humane world.

Statement by Ambassador Sherman-Peter, Permanent Observer of the Caribbean Community to the United Nations

Statement Mrs. Louise Bailey, Senior Political Officer and Officer-in-Charge of the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations

Statement by Ms. Mitchell, Associate Professor of History at New York University.

Thank you.

These remarks have given us a greater understanding of these women and their contribution to end slavery and defend women's rights.

I also wish to thank the Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery in Nantes, France, for partnering with us on this exhibition, which is based in large part upon its exhibit titled "Dix Femmes Puissantes".

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided to us by Ms. Diane Miller, National Program Manager of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, U.S. National Park Service.

Without any further ado, I now declare the exhibit officially open.

Thank you for joining us today.
