

29 March 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the NGO Event “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade:
Intergenerational Consequences, Resistance, Transformation and
Unfinished Business”**

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Firstly, I would like to thank the organizers of today's event - the Sub-committee for the Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance of the NGO on Human Rights.

It is appropriate, that following on from the commemoration by the General Assembly of 200 years of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade on Monday 26th March, that we consider the historical consequences of the trade and the impact on the present. It is also fitting that today's event coincides with the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racism.

We are also fortunate today to be lead in the discussion by an eminent group of academics and commentators. I am also glad that several UN organizations and the Permanent Representatives of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Dominica are with us today.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The trans-Atlantic slave trade stands as one of the most disgraceful enterprises in history. Slavery became an accepted part of the political economy of the time; and, racism and discrimination served to legitimize the trade.

Commemorating 200 years since of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade is a moral duty for us all.

It offers us the opportunity to recognize how profoundly inhuman the slave trade was; to remember the millions of victims who suffered, and to pay tribute to all those who campaigned for abolition. By acknowledging and taking responsibility for the past we all stand to gain.

We must also take this opportunity to acknowledge the cruelty that continues today. We live in an era of globalization, characterized by the increasing freedom of movement of people and goods across borders.

However, according to the International Labor Organization there are over 12 million modern day slaves around the world. In its modern guises, slavery persists as bonded and child labour, the forced recruitment of child soldiers, human trafficking, and the illegal sex trade.

Through this commemoration and Panel debate, I hope that we can come to terms with the injustices of the past, address the stigmas and prejudices that remain, and move forward together to a brighter future - free of slavery and racism.

In the memory of all those who suffered and continue to suffer, we must end all modern day manifestations of slavery and racism - for the well-being and dignity of all humanity.

Thank you very much.