

15 May 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Concert in Support of a Permanent Memorial to Honour the
Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

Good evening everyone, I am very happy to be with you tonight.

Your Excellency Raymond Wolfe, Permanent Representative of Jamaica and Chairman of the Permanent Memorial Committee,

Your Excellency Ismael Abraão Gaspar Martins, Permanent Representative of Angola and Chairman of the Group of African States for May 2012,

Mr. Maher Nasser, Acting Head of the United Nations Department of Public Information,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

My sincere thanks go to the organisers of this evening's event, the Department of Public Information, in partnership with the Steering Committee of Member States on the Slave Trade Observance, under the chairmanship of Ambassador Raymond Wolfe.

I would also like to welcome all the speakers and artists performing tonight.

We are fortunate to have with us a truly international line-up of performers, with unique perspectives on tonight's theme, "Honouring the Heroes, Resisters and Survivors of Slavery."

Almost two months ago, on 25 March, I presided over a special meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

On that day and again tonight, we are gathered to solemnly acknowledge the suffering of count-less innocent victims of slavery.

We salute the courage of the brave men and women, who rebelled against the cruel and brutal practice of slavery, and who, in doing so, re-gained their spirit and their independence, both during slavery and in its aftermath.

We collectively reaffirm the commitment of the international community to preventing such suffering from occurring again.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over a period of 400 years, millions of our African brothers and sisters were forcibly removed from their homes and cast into a lifetime of servitude, torment and despair.

The terrible impacts of slavery and the slave trade are still felt to this day.

They have devastated continents and countries.

Even today, while Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and slave trade shall be prohibited”, contemporary forms of slavery and slave-like practices continue to emerge.

The United Nations and all its members have an obligation to work tirelessly to eradicate modern forms of slavery.

We will continue to do so, until we have ended this shameful practice in all its forms.

Tonight, however, is an opportunity for us to celebrate.

We come together in this historic Hall, to listen to beautiful music and to honour the enduring spirit of victims of slavery.

Music was a powerful tool for the slaves and their descendants.

From the evils of slavery, music evolved, along with other rich cultural practices such as dance, cooking, poetry and story-telling.

This music is a powerful reminder that the spirit and culture of the slaves could not be diminished.

This music is a powerful reminder of the miracle of the endurance of the human spirit.

In closing, I would encourage each of you to support the plans to erect a Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery here at UN Headquarters.

Such a memorial will be a lasting tribute to one of the most tragic chapters in the history of humankind.

Thank you, and please enjoy this evening of music.

I wish you all the best. Good night.