



**Remarks**

**by**

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**President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations**

**General Assembly**

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Agenda Item 120: Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

*Please check against delivery*

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

Many of you will recall that paragraph 101 of the Durban Declaration of 2001 invited the international community and its member states to honour the victims of slavery and the slave trade in this follow-up exercise. All will no doubt recall that in December 2011, our Assembly endorsed the initiative of Member States to erect at a place of prominence at the United Nations headquarters, a permanent memorial in acknowledgement of the tragedy of slavery and the slave trade.

Approximately one month ago, I had the distinct honour to speak at the unveiling of the winning design for the Permanent Memorial honouring those victims. Three hundred and ten (310) artists from eighty-three (83) countries drew upon their creative faculties to reinforce, through the medium of the visual arts, sentiments to which member States had already given eloquent voice in the Durban Declaration, and also following its adoption.

The design that the judges considered to be most expressive of the desired message was appropriately entitled, "The Ark of Return," and its creative artist, Mr. Rodney Leon, was a native of Haiti, a country with an illustrious history in the struggle to end slavery, a struggle that has taken a heavy toll on its people. Mr. Leon describes his winning submission as depicting [quote] "a sacred space that is designed to psychologically and spiritually transport visitors to a place where acknowledgement, education, reflection and healing can take place" [end quote]. Just as other monuments erected on the grounds of our United Nations serve to remind the international community to honour the values of peace and non-violence, it is my true hope and wish that the soon-to-be-erected "Ark of Return," will serve a corresponding purpose as a tribute to the collective aspirations of this body: peace, human rights, social justice, and the dignity of the human person.

Excellencies,

2013 marks the 206<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. The General Assembly's engagement with the question of slavery and the slave trade continues with the current resolution before you today, as we recommit to raising public awareness about the legacy of this dark period in our past. Since the UN began consideration of this item, there have been numerous initiatives at the national and international level dedicated to the noble goals of remembering and honouring all the victims of this monstrously inhuman practice.

Through their various efforts Member States, UN agencies and civil society partners have celebrated the indomitable spirit of the victims of a tragedy that continues to be inflicted upon numerous persons today, albeit in more subtle forms, including social and economic inequality, hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice.

The report of the Secretary-General highlights the educational outreach and awareness-raising activities undertaken pursuant to resolution 67/108. These campaigns provide an opportunity not only to reflect upon the history and legacy of slavery but also to address questions such as the dearth of resources and materials in educational institutions worldwide on why it happened, the full extent of its consequences and what lessons we have learned from it. In addition to helping ensure that the past is remembered and never repeated, these activities also offer an opportunity to highlight the many, often overlooked contributions enslaved Africans made to their economies and communities.

Distinguished delegates,

Among the principles on which the Charter of our United Nations was shaped are those of equality and non-discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude, and that slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

By adopting this resolution today, we re-dedicate ourselves to the task of undertaking concrete and concerted actions that uphold these rights and freedoms; we also commit ourselves afresh to initiating and supporting efforts that make abundantly clear the debasing of humanity that such violations of human rights and dignity represent. My hope is that our joint recollection of the horrors of slavery and the slave trade will move us to further resolute and concerted action. Let us make a fresh resolve today that slavery, in whatever form or manifestation, will forever be a thing of the past.

Thank you.