

25 March 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the unveiling of the permanent memorial in honour of the victims
of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade**

**Your Excellency Portia Simpson-Miller, Prime Minister of Jamaica,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Ambassador John Ashe, President of the 68th Session of the General Assembly,
Honourable David Dinkins,
Honourable New York City Commissioners,
Distinguished New York State and City Representatives,
Distinguished guests,**

We are gathered here to honour the spirit, courage and legacy of the victims of slavery and transatlantic slave trade. This remains one of the darkest and most abhorrent chapters in all of our history.

Today is a remarkable moment in the history of the United Nations, as we pay homage to the millions of men, women and children who were victims of the largest forced migration in history.

To this day, the majority of the victims of this brutal and primitive trade in human lives remain unnamed and unknown. Nevertheless, their dignity and courage was boundless and worthy of this honour and tribute.

You may recall that on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2014, here in New York, we launched the International Decade for People of African Descent. Rodney Leon's Ark of Return is one of the most important contributions that will be made during the International Decade. The fact that we will unveil it today, on the first Remembrance Day of the Decade, is a major accomplishment.

This Memorial is a gift of history to everyone who will pass through its chamber on their way to our United Nations complex; the very place where world leaders have gathered to declare that all people are born free in dignity and have equal rights. It is also the place where world leaders are charged with promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all; without distinction.

As we walk through its chambers, the Ark of Return challenges us to study and learn from the lessons of the past. It is powerful illustration of the strength, courage and resilience of enslaved African peoples and their descendants.

As we reflect on this history, we have to remember the work that still remains to be done to counter the dangers of racism, injustice and prejudice; all of which remain pervasive in our world today.

This occasion also represents a window into our collective future, as we vow to prevent such injustices from ever being perpetrated again against our fellow human beings.

As I stressed before, we have an obligation to stop modern day slavery, in whatever form it may be disguised. According to the International Labour Organisation, almost 21 million people are victims of forced labour today. This is deplorable and unacceptable in the 21st century.

While this may be a solemn occasion, it is also an opportunity to celebrate the legacy of those unknown and unnamed enslaved Africans and honour their profound contributions to our societies, our institutions, and our world.

We thank Rodney Leon and those Member States, territories, organisations and individuals, who contributed to providing us with this moment to lift up the victims of slavery and their descendants as we declare, “Never again”.

I also commend all Members of the Permanent Memorial Committee for a job well done.

I thank you for your attention.