

20 October 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

The scale of the human suffering caused by the transatlantic slave trade is an affront on humanities' conscience.

For over 400 years, this reprehensible practice continued and was the largest forced migration in human history.

More than 15 million men, women and children were victims of this inhumane and barbaric system, forced against their will to leave their homes, families and communities.

Many lost their lives as the slave ships crossed the Atlantic Ocean.

And those that survived were forced to endure lives of humiliation and brutality.

Bought and sold like commodities, human dignity was stripped from all concerned.

Forced to work under deplorable conditions on plantations in textile mills and factories, slaves suffered while others built their fortunes on the back of this miserable system.

The commitment of Member States to ensuring that humanity does not forget this dark time of human history is to be commended.

The declaration of 25 March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and the establishment of a permanent memorial "The Ark of Return" at UN Headquarters, serve as permanent reminders. They help to educate us – and future generations – of the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade.

Distinguished Delegates,

Modern forms of slavery plague our world today, including human trafficking, forced labour, and child labour. The memory of the transatlantic slave trade gives huge moral imperative to us to effectively combat modern slavery.

This includes providing productive employment and decent work for all, in line with the provisions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Also, in memory of the slave trade, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and intolerance must be overcome whenever and wherever we find it.

Distinguished Delegates,

The historic struggle of enslaved people for freedom and equality took courage, hope and determination.

Those qualities exercised by a long-oppressed people inspire us today as we work to combat inequality and exploitation, and their eventual emancipation gives strength to the enduring human aspiration and defense of freedom.