

2 December 2013

**Message of H.E. John W. Ashe
President of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,
on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery**

The United Nations observes the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery annually as a reminder to all people that, much like its historical antecedent, modern slavery is an egregious violation of a person's basic human rights. This day, December 2, marks the adoption by the General Assembly, fifty years ago, of the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, which helped spark a global movement to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery, such as trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, child labour, forced marriage, and the recruitment of children in armed conflict.

Today, over 20 million persons are victims of modern day slavery and face daily struggles that you and I could never comprehend. The majority of those who suffer are the most vulnerable and marginalized in society.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are kidnapped and sold into bondage across international borders. Trafficking in persons is an issue of great global concern and affects almost all countries. This inhumane activity continues to flourish owing to vast economic disparities between nations, increasing flows of labour and commodities across international borders, and transnational organized criminal networks.

Slavery has been and continues to be perhaps the biggest human tragedy throughout history. Even when abolished, slavery leaves life-long emotional scars. It can tear families apart and leave individuals unable or ill equipped to re-enter their communities.

On this international day, I call on Member States to eradicate slavery in all its forms; to boost initiatives that promote social inclusion; and to end all forms of discrimination. We must promote and protect the rights of those most vulnerable within our societies, and help to restore the dignity of victims of slavery.