

23 August 2014

**Message of H.E. John W. Ashe  
President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,  
for International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its  
Abolition**

Over the course of 400 years, approximately 15 million men, women and children were victims of the transatlantic slave trade. Millions more were perhaps its unintended victims. This inhuman trade is one of the greatest and most sustained tragedies in human history. Recognized by the world community in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action as a crime against humanity, the slave trade dehumanized and enslaved whole populations, depriving Africa of its lifeblood for centuries and transforming the world forever.

UNESCO designated 23 August as International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition as a tribute to the slave uprising in Santo Domingo in August 1791. The annual commemoration is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to recall and reflect fully on the history of slavery. Understanding this historical legacy is critical to our efforts to address the scourges of racism and prejudice, which still plague us today.

This day is of particular significance in 2014: it is a celebration of the 20th anniversary of UNESCO's Slave Route Project, an educational, cultural and historical program, which has contributed to breaking the silence surrounding the slave trade and to understanding how it has shaped our modern societies. This year's commemoration also coincides with the launch, in the 69th session of the General Assembly, of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent.

As we honour the memory of the victims, we also pay tribute to the mostly anonymous heroes who fought tirelessly against injustice, for freedom and to put an end to this immense human tragedy. Their long struggle has contributed to our collective journey to ensure that human rights are truly universal. Today, their courage remains an inspiration for all of us, as we are called to uphold these human rights and fight against racism, modern slavery, and human trafficking. This spirit of struggle and remembrance is captured in the *Ark of Return*, the winning design for the permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade that was unveiled at UN Headquarters on 23 September 2013.

The sense of history is a beacon to illuminate the future. Sharing and transmitting the history of slavery can be an antidote to racism and hatred, fostering reconciliation and a culture of peace. On this day, I call on Member States, civil society and all stakeholders to join forces to support the educational, cultural and scientific programmes designed to enhance public awareness of the lessons, history and legacy of slavery and help spread the universal promise of freedom, equality and dignity for all human beings.