



Remarks

by

H.E. Ambassador John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

New York

23 September 2013

**Unveiling of the
Winning design for the Permanent Memorial to
Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

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Honorable Prime Minister,
Ministers,
Secretary-General,
Under-Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguish Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to collectively remember that the tragic era of the transatlantic slave trade marked a traumatic period felt primarily and painfully in the history of the peoples of African descent. This most ghastly period in human history speaks to the greed, ignorance, and racial prejudices that existed at the time and sadly, which still exist in many places today, albeit in somewhat diverse forms. But as we recall this ghastly period in history, let also take to our hearts what the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said to those who champion civil rights everywhere, *“If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail.”*

Excellencies,

This year- 2013- is the 206th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. In unveiling the Permanent Memorial honoring the victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we must not forget that human decency, bravery and ingenuity led to the breaking of the shackles of slavery and burdens of bigotry. Today, we once again honor these powerful human truths that where ever peoples are oppressed and crippled by discrimination, there are, and should be peoples who stand up to the oppressors, and speak up against discrimination.

There is a truism that says that those who do not remember the lessons of history are doomed to repeat its mistakes. Some may wish not to commemorate the suffering of the victims of slavery, preferring instead that the collective memories of humankind be sanitized and purged of such memories, but those of us who cherish freedom the most

and seek not to repeat the sins of the past choose not to forget. That is why we are here today.

Distinguished Guest,

I would like to acknowledge the artists from 83 nationalities who participated in this contest with the submission of 310 designs; it is you who keep our faith alive, often by being a voice of change and hope, and through your creativity, touch our hearts, minds and souls. Your ability to take stone, wood, metal or pigment and any and all materials available to create meaningful artwork deepens our faith in human goodness and decency, and for this, we are all grateful.

I wish to also thank the Secretary-General for supporting this initiative by CARICOM member States, which was quickly endorsed by members of the African Union. I acknowledge the supportive role played by UNESCO in bringing today's event to fruition. I also applaud the work of the Permanent Memorial Committee chaired by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica and I express gratitude to the member States, institutions and individual donors that have contributed to the realization of this vision that began in 2006 with a General Assembly resolution. (A/Res/61/19).

Our United Nations, which represents our shared aspiration for global peace and security is a fitting home for this new memorial. This new memorial will be a permanent voice to those who for more than 300 years had no say in the fulfillment of their own destinies. And it will serve as a reminder that the human family must never repeat the mistakes of its past.

But this memorial is not only about the past. Just as our UN represents the promise of peace, this memorial will also allow us, many of whom are descendants of slaves, to look toward the future with new promise. We are the living hope of our ancestors -- the dream that they envisioned would one day come to pass. This memorial will not only mark a period in history, but will serve as a marker of the distance we have traveled and as a

reminder to embrace the oneness of the human family and a future that benefits the whole of humankind.

Thank you.