

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION:
“LEST WE FORGET – THE TRIUMPH OVER SLAVERY”
New York, 1 March 2007**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank all the friends and partners who were involved in making this exhibition possible. The Governments of the Caribbean Community, the Government of India, and the Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture have produced a moving and fascinating show. I am proud of the UN's contributions to this effort.

The story of the end of the slave trade deserves to be told here at the United Nations. Indeed, the defense of human rights is at the heart of this Organization's global mission. Our Charter proclaims equal rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude”.

For too long, however, the transatlantic slave trade was a blight on the world. The illustrations in this exhibition depict the terrible dehumanization that prevailed during those centuries. Millions perished from the long march in Africa and the middle passage across the Atlantic. Millions were exploited under brutal conditions in the Americas, and saw their labour help build prosperous societies in which they had no say.

But if human beings showed yet again their capacity for cruelty, some showed a more noble side. Abolitionist movements sprung up. Slaves themselves rose up against their subjugation, most notably in Haiti.

Two hundred years ago tomorrow, United States President Thomas Jefferson signed legislation abolishing the slave trade. Later that same month, the British Parliament banned the slave trade throughout the British Empire. The tide had turned. Accordingly, the UN General Assembly has proclaimed 25 March of this year as a day on which the world should commemorate this important anniversary.

As we do so, we should remember that even today, many millions of our fellow human beings are subjected to slavery-like practices. These include debt bondage and the use of children in armed conflict. The victims are typically too scared to speak out. For all that has been accomplished in our campaign for human rights, we still have much to do.

This exhibition tells more than the story of the triumph over the slave trade. We also see men and women striving to maintain dignity and their culture in a world without mercy. Let us be inspired by their struggle. And let us finish the job that is still before us.

Now it is my great pleasure to declare this exhibition open.

Thank you.