

2 December 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,  
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,  
on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery**

The fact that the international community continues to dedicate an international day to highlight the persistence of slavery and the imperative to abolish this pervasive practice is a reflection of the inhumanity of the world in which we live. Millions of men, women and children around the world are condemned to servitude whether through forced labour, bonded labour, domestic labour, sexual exploitation, human trafficking or other forms of slavery.

The Charter of the United Nations reaffirms faith in the dignity and worth of the human person. Fifty-five years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed that "no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms". Over the years, the international community has adopted treaties and conventions against slavery and trafficking in human persons. Yet this ancient and heinous practice still persists.

Slavery is an affront to human dignity, a denial of the most basic of human rights. We therefore need to ask ourselves why this abhorrent and abusive practice continues in the twenty-first century. How is it that at a time of astounding progress in science, technology and advanced global communication; at a time of increased awareness of, and insistence on, the importance of respect for human rights, some 27 million persons are enslaved or work as forced labourers. How can it be that one human being can be deemed to be less worthy than the other and therefore condemned to a life of inhuman and unjust treatment?

We must not only ask ourselves these questions. We must encourage those countries that have not done so to ratify, and all countries to implement the International Conventions on slavery, trafficking in human persons and all forms of human exploitation. Importantly, we must work steadfastly to eradicate slavery worldwide.