

10 December 2014

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Pledging Luncheon for the Permanent Memorial to Honour the
Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

**Mr. Serge Letchimy, President of the Regional Council of Martinique,
Excellencies,
Mr. Deputy Secretary-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to be with you this afternoon and to host this Pledging Luncheon for the Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. My appreciation goes to the Global Sustainable Development Foundation for sponsoring this event.

Today we are privileged to be joined by many well-wishers and supporters, including the delegations that have travelled all the way from Angola, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Martinique and the Republic of the Congo.

This is also my first opportunity to officially congratulate Mr. Rodney Leon on his outstanding design for the Memorial, which will occupy a place of prominence on the grounds of the United Nations.

Dear Friends,

But as we honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, the grim reality is that modern slavery exists; it did not end with abolition in the 19th century. This practice still continues in one form or another. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) around 21 million men, women and children around the world are in a form of slavery. But we must remember that apart from physical slavery, the greatest of all slavery is the slavery of the mind. Today's event is a reminder that combating slavery requires the combined efforts of us all. Together, we can end slavery in our lifetime and we must. We owe this fight to this generation and future generations.

The Memorial therefore will serve as an important tool to educate and inform current and future generations of the causes, consequences and lessons of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The Memorial will also serve as a key educational outreach tool throughout the International Decade for People of African Descent.

Friends, although we are almost to the finish line, we are not there yet. There is still some ground to cover in terms of the remaining cost of erecting the Memorial. That is why this event is so important.

I would like to applaud the Permanent Memorial Committee, including Chairman, Ambassador Rattray, the Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations, for their steadfast dedication to completing this important Memorial.

I join the Committee in asking for your generous support today to close the Memorial's \$500,000.00 budget shortfall and ensure its final construction.

I thank you for attending this event, and much like you all, I look forward to the International Day of Remembrance activities on 25 March 2015, when the Permanent Memorial will be inaugurated.

Thank you.

10 December 2014

Luncheon to raise funds for the Permanent Memorial to and Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Statement by Mr. Serge Letchimy, Member of Parliament, President of the Regional Council of Martinique

**H.E. Mr. Mr. Sam Kutesa Kahamba, President of the 69th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations,
H.E. Mr. Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, representing His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General,
Excellences, Distinguished Ministers,
Heads of High-Level Delegations to this event,
H.E. Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations in New York and Chairman of the Permanent Memorial to Honor the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade,
Excellences, Permanent Representatives and Observers,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Artists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Martinique delegation, allow me to thank you for the warm welcome afforded to us at the United Nations.

We are happy to be associated with the project of the Permanent Memorial to Honor the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

This moment is truly historic, for two reasons.

The first reason is that we are all gathered together as brothers of the Americas, the Caribbean and Africa around the memory for our common ancestors.

What we share is an injury; this is what this Memorial will primarily express.

A founding injury. A monumental injury.

Africa was injured. The trade founded the Americas. It planted seeds all over the Caribbean.

For thousands of years to come, it has profoundly changed the face of the entire world.

Millions of our ancestors were shipped to these shores.

Millions of our ancestors endured the chains' iron, the terror at the bottom of ships as well as the misfortunes of sugar cane and cotton fields.

We are the children of those who survived.

We are also the children of those who disappeared, transforming the Atlantic Ocean into one of the largest cemeteries in the world today.

This terrible trajectory –a bottomless abyss- engendered all humiliations and an impressive trail of suffering and horror. But it sparked a buzz of humanity from which all forms of resistance, heroism and resilience grew. The shadows of darkness generated light. Dehumanization fostered great leaps of humanity. Humanity in survival, humanity in music and dances, humanity in thought and in the revival of all knowledge or creative forms. While we cannot forget all the shadows that reflected the horrors of the Trade, it is our duty to pass on the torch of the light. We should not turn this crime into a source of bitterness, or in locking ourselves therein, but we should raise it to the height of the foundation of a human experience. It is this transmutation that I welcome today, and that is precisely what this memorial will symbolize.

This is a historic moment for a second reason.

We are at the United Nations, an organization that embodies the wishes and hopes of most peoples of the world.

It reflects a desire for a life of better togetherness.

It reflects the hope of peace and brotherhood.

That this memorial is constructed under its aegis is a sign that it is neither a mere nor a single act by slave descendants. We are indeed gathered here today as children of the world's diverse family: children of the Americas, children of the Caribbean, children of Africa, children of a world spread throughout the explosions of conquest and domination, and nevertheless, children of a world reconstituted in a new paradigm of complexity and renewal. Our children reside and find love on all continents. They work in all languages of the world. They dance on all world music rhythms. They live in cities where many stories and memories are constantly shared and challenged. Therefore, no history can be told if the history of others is not sustained. No memory can be sustained if the memory of others is not preserved. We are here to recall that the world today is aware of its incontrovertible oneness. We are here to state that the history of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade is a significant part of what makes the world. Whichever history of the world attempts to ignore this truth would upset History. A memory of the world that would forget this insults the very concept of remembrance.

This Memorial will tell the world that in the name of our ancestors, in remembering their suffering and resistance, we call for a concerted union of all the stories and all the memories. The Memorial will state that the only way to prevent this or another form of barbarism to come back and haunt would be to strive together, to become better; to be open in the sharing our stories, to raise to the height of respectful compliance with our memories. This is the only way to embark on the light that our ancestors used to fight the deadly blows of the darkest trade.

Through my voice, the people of the country of Aimé Césaire would like to recall that our commitment to this cause will go unabated.

Aimé Césaire has in fact never stopped fighting for the dignity of all. He opened the way for the men and women of dignity and conscience. In all parts of the world, those who pursued his engagement and extended his struggle are now innumerable. Our duty is to be counted among those embarking on this beautiful trail. By our actions, by our efforts we will adorn this Memorial with all the worthy values dear to all those and also to the United Nations.

Therefore, the meaning of my presence here is to: express the hope of a world which makes diversity the basis of its unity; proclaim the need for a greater humanization of global policies; appeal to all that never, never again, a crime of such magnitude against humanity should be perpetrated.

Thank you.