

25 March 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,  
President of the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Commemorative Meeting to Mark the International Day of  
Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave  
Trade**

**Excellency, Portia Simpson-Miller, Prime Minister of Jamaica,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Secretary-General,  
Ambassador John Ashe, President of the 68th Session of the General Assembly,  
Distinguished guests,**

Today, as we commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we focus on “Women and Slavery” and the hardships borne by enslaved women. We also pay tribute to those women and others who fought for the abolition of slavery and succeeded in passing on the rich heritage of their ancestral African cultures.

For both black men and women, slavery was a devastating experience. Both were torn from their birthplaces, families and communities, forced to perform gruelling labour, subjected to mental and physical degradation, and denied their most basic human rights.

Enslaved men and women were brutalised, arbitrarily separated from loved ones and treated as chattel property.

History tells us that despite these common factors, the circumstances of slavery were different for black women and black men.

The plight of female slaves was highlighted by Deborah Gray White who wrote in her landmark work, “Ar’n’t I a Woman?”, that a slave woman was black in a white society, a slave in a free society and a woman in a society ruled by men.

Enslaved women worked in the fields alongside the men, did household chores and were mothers to their own children as well as surrogates to the children of the masters. They also suffered the indignity of sexual exploitation at the hands of overseers and plantation owners.

When it came to resistance, enslaved women also played an important role. As often as they could, black women, just as black men, rebelled against the inhumanities of slave owners. Enslaved women learned to rely heavily on each other and today, the descendants of these brave women are the bedrock

of the culture of the African Diaspora and continue to hold together their homes, extended families and communities.

Despite the oppression of slavery, enslaved women brought with them the creativity and ingenuity of their ancestors. We can take pride in the fact that many African traditions survived the horrors of the Middle Passage.

Many of you just joined us outside for the unveiling of the Permanent Memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The significance of Rodney Leon's Ark of Return is that it ensures that we will never forget the injustices of slavery. At the same time it inspires hope.

While we reflect on the past and the progress made including the abolition of slavery and slave trade, we must also acknowledge that slavery continues in many forms and manifestations.

It is deplorable that even today, many innocent women and young girls are still held in bondage and are denied their freedoms and right to dignified lives due to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. In addition many children continue to be held in servitude as child labourers.

We must intensify our collective efforts to combating and eliminating such abuses.

Our commitment to the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international human rights standards should be translated into the respect for all of humanity.

I thank you for your attention.