



UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
(64<sup>th</sup> Session)

STATEMENT

by

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PERMANENT MISSION OF SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY  
(CARICOM)

at the

**Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly  
on the Occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of  
the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

March 25, 2010

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Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

I have the distinct honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the 14 Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

One of the greatest artists of our Caribbean Civilisation, the late Robert Nesta Marley, once sang in his song “Slave Driver” that:

*Every time I hear the crack of a whip,  
my blood runs cold.  
I remember on the slave ship,  
how they brutalised my very soul.*

It is that brutalisation that brings us together in this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. For as Bob Marley makes clear, the slave ship was beyond an indignity. It was beyond barbarism. It was beyond inhuman. It was, apart from the physical atrocities, a brutalisation of the psyche of a people so violent and enduring that it has created a shared cultural memory of the trauma. A collective memory that lives so vividly in the souls of those who have died that it is bequeathed to those of us who live today and to those yet unborn. For the CARICOM Member States at the United Nations, it is a scar that is 14 countries wide and 400 years deep. For the world, it remains a festering sore on the conscience of humanity.

This scar on our Caribbean soul remains to this day a noise in our blood and an echo in our bones. It is given voice and flesh every day through our cultural expressions, each of which is shaped and informed by this peculiar legacy. You hear it in the words we speak, and our songs of struggle and freedom. You see it in the way we dress, and the way we move. You taste it in the foods we eat. You recognise it in the similarities and surviving traditions between our brothers and sisters on the African continent and their violently uprooted kin. You feel it in a Caribbean Civilisation that instinctively and comprehensively rejects oppression, subjugation and exploitation, even as the decedents of enslaved Africans, slave masters and indentured labourers have managed to miraculously and triumphantly craft a peaceful and harmonious societal fabric from the disparate threads of brutality, misery and rebellion. As the theme of this year’s remembrance activities recognizes, our vibrant culture, in and of itself, is an eloquent expression of our hard-won freedom.

Mr. President,

CARICOM Member States are grateful for our continuing partnership with the African Union, the wider UN Membership and the UN Secretariat – particularly the Department of Public Information – for their support of this annual recognition and honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Today’s decision A/64/L.50 represents the strength of the global consensus regarding the importance of this International Day of Remembrance.

Similarly, wish to highlight the central importance of Resolution 64/15, which welcomes CARICOM’s initiative to erect, at a place of prominence at UN Headquarters, a permanent memorial in acknowledgement of the tragedy and in consideration of the legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The central importance of this initiative to CARICOM cannot be overstated. We encourage Member States to assist in the construction of the permanent memorial through contributions to the trust fund for the permanent memorial, which is administered by the United Nations Office for Partnerships. We are most grateful to those States that have already contributed to the fund, and especially thankful to those that have made multiple pledges and contributions. In that regard, CARICOM offers special commendations to the government and people of India, who have demonstrated noteworthy and particular generosity in their support of this effort.

Mr. President,

The slave ship, and the systematic and abhorrent exploitation that it represents, can never be forgotten. Today, we honour the memory of the victims of the slave trade – those who perished on the journey and those black survivors who triumphed over unimaginable adversity to shape new independent nations of free men and women. We pay special tribute this year to Haiti, the first nation to break the shackles of subjugation, and the enduring seat of our Caribbean strength and pride. As our Haitian brothers and sisters confront the catastrophe of recent earthquakes, we have no doubt that, with the help of the international community, they will triumph, as they have triumphed over all prior adversities. We in CARICOM also salute the memory of the indigenous peoples of our region – the Arawak, the Kalinago and the Garifuna inhabitants – whose tales of extermination through disease and genocide are also entwined with our own redemption song.

Mr. President,

According to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon “those who controlled the transatlantic slave trade made huge profits from death, misery and exploitation.” Their profit was our tragic loss, both on the African continent and throughout its far-flung Diaspora. That loss is a debt that remains unpaid on humanity’s ledger book. Today’s event – and our future remembrances – represents the tiniest of down payments on this historical debt. This day also stands as a rebuke to those who profited, those who ignored, and those who justified the horrors of slavery and the slave trade. Today, we honour, we remember, and we shall never forget.

I thank you.