

STATEMENT BY MR. VISHVJIT P SINGH, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, ON AGENDA ITEM
108 – FOLLOW-UP TO THE COMMEMORATION OF THE TWO-HUNDREDTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE ABOLITION OF THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE AT THE
63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 20, 2008

Mr. President,

I am pleased to participate in the general discussion on the agenda item titled, 'Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade'. I thank the Member States of the Caribbean region for bringing this important item on to the agenda of the General Assembly. I firmly support the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Caribbean states.

Mr. President,

Former Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru had called Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade an 'infinite tragedy'. In the Swahili language, it is sometimes referred to as 'Maafa', meaning holocaust or great disaster. It is often overlooked that the tragic crime of transatlantic slave trade and slavery extended over more than five centuries. Scholars have estimated that during this period the Atlantic slave trade led to at least loss of 50 million potential African lives: had this not happened Africa's population in 1850 would have been 100 million instead of 50 million. The horror of the Middle Passage is unique, during which, without food and basic amenities, at least one-sixth of those transported died in loneliness and darkness and trauma.

Mr. President,

India shares the pain and suffering of the affected countries. We remember our own tragedy of colonialism and the export of indentured labour. The racism that was an inevitable dimension of slavery became part of the rationale for colonialism. There was a boomerang effect: Nazism was simply this racism applied within Europe. As the great Caribbean poet Césaire said, "the poison was slowly distilled into the veins of Europe" and Nazism, "before engulfing the whole edifice of Western civilization in its reddened waters, had oozed and trickled from every crack".

Mr. President,

We welcome the resolution adopted by the General Assembly two years back on the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and also the General Assembly's decision to commemorate this in the UN by convening a special session of the General Assembly on March 26, 2007. I would also like to welcome the Secretary General's report on the programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

Mr. President,

We are honoured to co-sponsor this year's resolution titled, 'Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade'. A permanent memorial will symbolize this colossal tragedy and remain before our eyes as a permanent remembrance, to stir us to thought and action. We join the CARRICOM countries in requesting the Member States to contribute to this Memorial and adopt this resolution.

I thank you Mr. President.

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