UNGA

Agenda Item 137

Follow up to the commemoration of the
Two hundredth anniversary of the abolition of
Transatlantic Slave Trade
20 October 2016

INDIA STATEMENT

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Mr. President,

We thank the Secretary General for his report on the follow up to the commemoration of the two hundredth anniversary of the abolition of trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade represents one of the darkest phase in human history, when forces of globalisation began to shape the modern world several centuries ago. The impacts of the slave trade continue to be felt acutely even today.

It is important to understand what the slave trade meant, so that we can draw lessons from our collective history and make sure that this cannot happen again. It is equally important for the younger and future generations to carry that memory.

Mr. President,

At its very basic, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was the manifestation of naked greed and immoral pursuance of profit coupled with unbridled abuse of power exercised over the weak.

The sheer scale of this crime against humanity is mindboggling.

It lasted for four centuries, destroying lives and communities across generations from vast regions of Africa, South America and the Caribbean on both sides of the Atlantic.

It fundamentally altered the societies, economies and polity in these regions for centuries to come.

Importantly, it helped achieve great wealth and prosperity and progress for some countries, built upon unspeakable misery and destruction in distant continents, in a frightening instance of what an ungoverned and lawless globalisation can lead to.

Mr. President,

While the uprooted African communities have contributed greatly to the local economies, they have also contributed immensely to and influenced the arts and culture and life of societies where they now live.
However, the deep wounds inflicted by the slave trade continue to fester till today. Entire communities, including indigenous communities, continue to face scars of deep rooted racial discrimination, oppression and chronic poverty.

The wounds are also reflected in chronic underdeveloped and distorted economies that were deliberately designed for the profit of elite in faraway lands in a bygone era.

Mr. President,

It is our collective responsibility to prevent recurrence of crimes and injustices such as the slave trade. It is our duty to remember the sacrifice that millions of people had to make being forcibly uprooted from their homelands over generations to toil in miserable conditions for the profit of others.

Mr. President,

It was, therefore, satisfying to note that the efforts of the Caribbean community supported by African nations and others finally led to the establishment of the permanent memorial 'Ark of Return' last year at the United Nations. India is proud to have joined as one of the lead contributors to the Permanent Memorial fund.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade on 25 March honours the memory of the millions who suffered through this brutal system and helps raise awareness about the injustice and dangers of racism and prejudice.

This year to mark this day, India and the Department of Public Information co-organised an exhibition on the history of enslaved East Africans who were taken to India. Many of these rose to positions of military and political authority in India. The exhibition brings out the far greater social mobility experienced by these individuals in India.

UNESCO has also played a key role in organising and linking programmes through the Slave Route Project to spread the understanding of the impact and consequences of the slave trade.

Mr. President,

With the abolition of slavery the colonial powers turned to using millions of Indian indentured labour, at virtually no cost, to work on plantations across the world to perpetuate their economic domination. The UNESCO project on International Indentured Labour Route is another significant effort to preserve the memory and lessons of this phase.

Mr. President,

We must continue to raise awareness about the Slave Trade through education and outreach activities. This would promote a greater understanding of how our complex world has been shaped and what can be done to avoid the injustices of the past.