



INDIA भारत

OPENING REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR ASOKE K. MUKERJI,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF INDIA TO THE
UNITED NATIONS, ON BEHALF
OF THE VOLUNTARILY CONTRIBUTORS TO THE
PERMANENT MEMORIAL TO HONOUR THE
VICTIMS OF SLAVERY AND TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE
AT THE
UNITED NATIONS VISITORS PLAZA

NEW YORK

MARCH 25, 2015

Distinguished President of the General Assembly Mr Sam Kutesa,
Distinguished Secretary General of the United Nations Mr Ban Ki-Moon,
Distinguished Prime Minister of Jamaica Madam Portia Simpson Miller,
Distinguished Director General of UNESCO Madam Irina Bokova,
Excellencies and Friends,

I am grateful to the Chairman of the Permanent Memorial Committee, my dear friend Ambassador Courtenay Rattray, Permanent Representative of Jamaica, for inviting me to address this historic occasion on behalf of the contributors to the Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

Further down along this shore, not very far from here, there is another iconic memorial, the Statue of Liberty, which is recognized as a symbol of freedom and democracy. The Ark of Return unveiled here today is in many ways a fitting counterpoint to the Statue of Liberty. Each memorial illuminates the meaning of the other.

The pernicious laws that sought to regulate the Slave Trade were repealed from 1833 onwards as a result of a sustained campaign by human rights defenders. The vigilance of these activists ensured that other laws passed to circumvent the banning of slavery, such as legalizing the use of indentured labour, which Mahatma Gandhi called “a remnant of slavery”, were similarly repealed.

The multilateral framework for our contemporary obligation to act against this evil practice is grounded in the 1926 Convention to Suppress Slavery and the Slave Trade, adopted by the League of Nations, and its supplementary Conventions adopted by us here at the United Nations.

The long list of voluntary contributors to United Nations Trust Fund, both member states as well as individuals, illustrates the widespread commitment of the international community to ensure that we never forget this pernicious stain on the history of humankind.

It was in June 1946 that my country, India, became the first member state to raise in the United Nations General Assembly the need to act against racial discrimination. Our voluntary contribution of US\$ 260,000 to the United Nations Trust Fund for Partnerships, which has ensured the unveiling of this Memorial today, is a visible manifestation of our continued commitment to this objective.

On behalf of the contributors, I would like to sincerely congratulate Mr Rodney Leon, the architect and designer of the Ark of Return Memorial, which all visitors to the United Nations will see as they enter United Nations Headquarters.

The Ark will hopefully, to quote the words of India's national poet, Rabindranath Tagore, guide us into that "heaven of freedom", where "the mind is without fear and the head is held high", so that future generations can collectively ensure that the tragedy of slavery will never again befall humankind.

Thank you.