

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. TÉTE ANTÓNIO, PERMANENT  
OBSERVER OF THE AFRICAN UNION TO THE UNITED NATIONS ON  
THE OCCASION OF THE ARK OF RETURN UNVEILING CEREMONY**

**NEW YORK, MARCH 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2015**

Your Excellency, Mr. **Sam Kutesa**, President of the General Assembly,  
Your Excellency, Mr. **Ban Ki-Moon**, Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
Honorable **Portia Simpson-Miller**, Prime Minister of Jamaica,  
Your Excellency, Mrs. **Irina Bukova**, Director General of UNESCO,  
Your Excellency, Mr. **Courtney Rattray**, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the  
United Nations and Chair of the Permanent Memorial Committee,  
Your Excellency, Mr. **Asoke Kumar**, Permanent Representative of India to the UN  
Mr. **Rodney Leon**, Architect and Designer of the "Ark of Return"  
Honorable Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
All Protocols observed,

Allow me at the outset to convey, H. E. **Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**, Chairperson of the African Union Commission's best wishes to this august gathering and her deepest gratitude for the invitation extended to her to participate in this historic event and the unveiling the "Ark of Return". Unfortunately due to circumstances beyond her control, she is unable to be with us today for the observation of the eighth *International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*.

I wish to pay tribute to H. E. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon without whom this unveiling ceremony would not have been possible. His unwavering support, personal commitment and, sterling leadership throughout the past 8 years today, translate vision into reality. We truly owe him a debt of gratitude!

It is also only fitting to recognize and seize the opportunity to once again congratulate Mr. Rodney Leon for the exceptional design for the Memorial. The hard work of the Permanent Memorial Committee together with the tremendous outpour of goodwill and contributions from Member States as well as from Foundations are all worthy of commendation.

I am indeed honored to represent the African Union at this event – a memorial which symbolizes the millions of African people who endured the extreme conditions on slave ships during the Middle Passage and the subsequent horrors of enslavement upon their arrival. Even today, after the end of the transatlantic slave trade, slavery continues to claim victims. According to the International Labour

Organization (ILO) around 21 million men, women and children around the world are in a form of slavery.

The transatlantic slave trade casts a dark and grim shadow over history. The transatlantic slave trade forced millions from their homes, uprooting from their villages and forcing them into lives of bondage and suffering. This abhorrence in history is composed of an abundance of stories of pain, suffering, and unspeakable injustice. And even though slaves languished in social, emotional, and psychological oppression, heroes rose. These heroes rose in the hope and joy of freedom, not only for themselves, but also for their communities. These heroes dared to dream and fight for a better world, leaving behind legacies of tremendous strength and strong will as aptly captured in the words of William Prescott, "They will remember that we were sold, but not that we were strong. They will remember that we were bought, but not that we were brave."

Today's unveiling of the "Ark of Return", to honor the victims of slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade represents a historic landmark on the grounds of the United Nations to: *"Acknowledge the tragedy and consider the legacy of slavery and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: lest we forget"* In the words of the General Resolution 63/5 of 2008.

***The Ark of Return***, will also serve as a global acknowledgement of the tragedy of slavery, consider its legacy and, lest we forget, call into remembrance the abhorrent transatlantic slave trade. The Ark of Return is also the perfect space to reflect on the main goal of the United Nations: the promotion and preservation of the dignity, freedom and equality of all human beings.

In conclusion, let us draw lessons from this scourge of slavery by quoting one of the most valuable thinkers of the Pan Africanism, the Great W.E.B. Du Bois when he stated in his Paper presented at the National Negro Conference held here in New York in 1909, named "the Evolution of Race Problem", I quote: **"human nature is not simple and any classification that roughly divides men in good and bad, superior and inferior, slave and free, is and must be ludicrously untrue and universally dangerous as a permanent exhaustive classification.**" end of quote.

Today, we view this unveiling of the Ark of return as a Good example of the triumph of A People against all odds.

I thank you for your kind attention.