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Speech

by

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E ku dede Iwoyi o, eyin ara mi ni Orile-edo Dominican, Mo Ki yin
l'Oruko Ajo UNESCO, Paapa julo l'oruko Oludari Agba, Koichiro
Matsuura ati Alaga Igbimo Oludari, Hans-Heinrich Wrede, Mo ki yin
Kaabo sinu Ipade agbaye fun Isami Ikonileru ni iha Guusu America.
Mo ki yin pupo, mo si dupe lowo yin fun bi eti gbami ni alejo. Inu mi
dun pupo lati wa ni aarin yin.

Excellencies:

I have just given you my greetings in Yoruba, the language spoken by millions in Nigeria, Tog, Benin, Cuba, Brazil and several Latin American and Caribbean countries. I have used the same language to pray for you for wisdom and Divine Favour in the discharge of your responsibilities and performance of your several functions in life. The exact words are as follow:

Greetings to you, brothers and sisters of the Dominican Republic, I bring you warm greetings from UNESCO, from the Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, the Chairman of UNESCO Executive Board, Hans-Heinrich Wrede and UNESCO's Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural dialogue to this International seminar on slave trade and slavery in the Caribbean. I extend to you my most profound heartfelt greetings, and I thank you for the wonderful manner in which you have received me.

It is indeed my pleasure to be here with you today, to mark the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition. I should particularly wish to thank the Dominican Republic Government for its strong support to UNESCO especially, the members of the Dominican Republic Slave Route Committee.

I stand here today, to speak as a free citizen of the world. Freedom is a fundamental human right and as stated in the charter of the United Nations, it is one of UNESCO's watchwords in furthering the universal respect for justice, for the peoples of the world without distinction of race, sex, language or religion.

Slavery in the Caribbean as elsewhere was a cruel institution, a totalitarian system for economic, political, and social benefits, based on force, violence and racial ideology. In spite of the evils of slavery, the institution had widespread support for a long time. It was encouraged and sanctioned, by governments, and surprisingly, it was also supported by the Christian churches. In the later half of the eighteenth century, Caribbean slavery began to come under increasingly serious attack from two sources. One of them was a secular intellectual movement in France known as the Enlightenment and led by eminent thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who stressed ideas such as the liberty, equality and fraternity of the human race. The second source was a humanitarian movement in England that emerged out of a major evangelical revival. This new thinking suggested that it was more economically advantageous to have Africans remain in their homeland to produce these materials and goods rather than to purchase slaves to be sent to the Caribbean.

The abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery had several important implications. The most obvious was the fact that many planters were not prepared to accept this new thinking. The early abolitionists of slavery were captives and slaves themselves, followed by Abolitionist societies, committees and groups who based their arguments essentially on moral, religious, and occasionally on economic advantages and benefits. This was a means of resisting the slave trade and slavery to which the powerful lobbies of planters responded with fierce resistance.

The Dominican people played a key role in breaking the silence. Despite great obstacles, they succeeded in imposing the abolition of servitude in the colonies and subsequent independence of their country. They created the historical recognition of their existence, which is indeed one of their truly vital achievements as a nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This painful experience, demonstrates the need to eliminate all forms of modern slavery. It constitutes a scandalous calamity in the history of mankind that must never be repeated in any form. We must mobilize our efforts individually, collectively, formally and informally to expose the horrors of the slave trade, slavery and the attitudes that led to its acceptance.

The Bicentenary of the abolition of slavery invites us to ponder upon the past in order to understand the present and forge ahead together.

The Dominican Committee on the Slave Route, with the support of UNESCO, set out to organize this seminar to create a "dialogue between the towns, the different areas of knowledge of slave trade and slavery and the human activities involved".

This dialogue, therefore, brings a positive response to the defence of human dignity and cultural diversity that UNESCO considers so crucial for peaceful co-existence.

The Slave Route Project is regarded as a « Flagship Project ». The International Year seeks to contribute to a culture of tolerance between races and people. This project was inspired by the need to conduct a historical study of the trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan slave trade and slavery. Consequently, it will highlight the social interactions and political consequences that slavery has generated among the peoples of Europe, Africa, America and the Caribbean; and their cultural pluralism and diversity. The project has elaborated a strategy for action to mobilize and involve the scientific and artistic communities, political authorities, local population and the media. Tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the slave trade and slavery are to be safeguarded. For this reason, within the framework of the "Slave Route" project, an inventory of sites of memory and resistance places in the Caribbean were carried out by the Museum Associations of the Caribbean in 2000. The protection and promotion of oral traditions on the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Caribbean is planned for the biennium 2004-2005.

In addition to scientific research and information programmes focusing on the influence of slavery on the cultures of all the countries concerned, UNESCO is initiating a study on the links between slavery and cultural diversity, miscegenation of cultures, music, multilingualism, Creole culture, culinary arts and modes of dress.

To fortify these efforts, UNESCO proclaimed 2004, the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition. The "Slave Route" project led to the recognition of slavery as a "crime against humanity" by the world conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerance in Durban in 2001.

This project has explored the rich cultural intangible heritage generated by slave trade in Africa, which has left its mark on the formation of many cultures and civilizations of the world.

Owing to numerous factors, Africa remains one of the poorest continents in the world today. Could one of these factors be the depletion of the continent of its most precious resources? Its human resources? There is no doubt that the movement of millions of Africans to the new world had a determining influence on the shaping of cultures, transformation of the

world and the interaction between the peoples of Africa, Europe, America and the Caribbean.

Caribbean history and culture definitely bear the stamp of African influence. This is often expressed in the form of arts, most notably in music inherited directly from slaves such as the Dominican merengue, salsa, rumba, cha-cha, jazz and Gospel hymns. Africa's imprint can be found in Caribbean culture through such varied expressions as poetry, proverbs, dances, and even forms of clothing. Regarding spiritual traditions, the ***Lucumi culture is, - of Yoruba origin***. This culture illustrates some general principles about cultural reproduction across space and time.

Transported slaves found strength in the spiritual and cultural traditions they carried with them. Culture was a tool for maintaining the integrity, personality and collective will of the people subjugated, assaulted, oppressed and deprived physically and emotionally. Cultural heritage is a key component of identities and is becoming a key factor for both economic growth and social cohesion. It plays an increasingly important role in providing young people in particular with a sense of belonging and identity.

We are beginning to understand that diasporas do not simply inherit primordial traditions and transmit them by memory, survival and retelling. Rather, they reformulate available cultural repertoires and adapt them to new purposes often through such vehicles as literature, and socio-cultural movements.

When Africans were taken to the Caribbean Island as slaves between 1770 and 1840, they took their culture and religion with them. Once in the New World, these Africans in bondage were forced to accept other forms of religion and culture, never-the-less, they did not abandon their traditions completely. In other words, they created a new form of worship with elements taken from both religion and culture. An example of such practice is the case of the ***Orisha also of Yoruba origin***.

UNESCO has demonstrated its commitment to this Struggle through conferences, seminars, meetings celebrations, workshops and more specifically through its "Slave Route" project. It has pledged to illuminate the repercussions of this human tragedy. UNESCO has dedicated itself to building deeper awareness among nations, cultures, religions, races in and beyond the countries that were affected by this tragic chapter of history.

For the benefit of a living memory, UNESCO's objective is to seek through descendants of former slaves, ways to revitalize the memory of the young in particular, by showing the tangible and intangible traces of slavery and its abolition. This includes the revision of school textbooks and the promotion of intercultural learning and mutual respect between cultures and people.

UNESCO is also working on the reinforcement of the 1972 Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in order to meet new challenges associated with the globalization process and the evolving definition of heritage itself. One of the key aspects will be the integration of heritage conservation strategies into regional and urban planning and sustainable development strategies. This will include eco-cultural tourism and the recognition of traditional management regimes.

In conclusion, this International Year will not only be focusing on the vast geographical area covered by the slave trade and slavery; but will also be concentrating on the multifaceted complexity of the human element involved, the importance of the psychological dimension, the political, social and cultural issues in countries and regions.

The commemoration of the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition aims to promote a culture of peace and to effectively and objectively deal with the impact and consequences of the slave trade and slavery, its human cost, the fundamental moral issue it raises, and its cultural, social and political consequences. These issues have become the subject of a rigorous international multidisciplinary study today. As the leading agency for this International Year, UNESCO is determined to highlighting the mechanisms and results of the intercultural dialogue generated between Europe, Africa, the America and the Caribbean.

Ultimately, this seminar and International Year aims to make people around the world aware of the need to remember the extreme violence of the slave trade and slavery and the heritage it has engendered on the three continents and beyond.

And if I may seek your indulgence, I would like to repeat in Spanish, the language I have much valued for a long time but which is hardly spoken in the part of Africa where I came from, the expression of the greetings with which I started:

Saludos a mis hermanos y hermanas de la República Dominicana. Les traigo cordiales recuerdos de la UNESCO, de su Director General, Koïchiro Matsuura, del Presidente del Consejo Ejecutivo, Hans-Heinrich Wrede, y de la División de Políticas Culturales y Diálogo intercultural, a este Seminario Internacional de la Ruta del Esclavo. Reciban mis más caluroso y cordial saludo, y mi profundo agradecimiento por la maravillosa acogida que me han dispensado.

Thank you.

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