

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE OF THE
VICTIMS OF SLAVERY AND THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

*“Justice in Action: Confronting History,
Advancing Dignity, Empowering Futures”*

New York, 25 March 2026

[all-English]

Today, we reflect on a deep betrayal of human dignity:

The abduction of millions of Africans, stolen from families and communities they would never see again.

Their trafficking across the Atlantic, in conditions so cruel one in seven did not survive the journey.

And their enslavement in the Americas, where generations were brutally exploited for their labour and denied their basic humanity.

These monstrous acts were the core of a global economic and social order.

A system born of greed, built on lies, and enforced by violence.

A system that prevailed for over 400 years — and haunts our world even now.

A system that reflected the worst of humanity.

That’s why today is more than a time of remembrance.

It is a moment to confront the lasting legacies of inequality and racism.

We will never forget the victims of slavery.

And we must never forget the malevolent system that sustained it for so long.

I am thinking of the laws that deprived enslaved people of literacy, autonomy, and humanity.

The economic, financial, and trade networks that enabled elites and empires — including my own country — to amass wealth built on stolen lives and stolen labour.

And the barbaric punishments that maintained control — from shackles and iron collars to flogging and sexual violence.

This was not simply forced labour.

It was a machinery of mass exploitation and deliberate dehumanization of men, women and children.

The wounds run deep — and often go unrecognized.

I have often said, the transatlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity that struck at the core of personhood, broke up families, and devastated communities.

To justify the unjustifiable, slavery's proponents and beneficiaries constructed a racist ideology — turning prejudice into a pseudoscience.

This perverse global order thrived because power acted without conscience.

We must use *our* power for better ends.

By rejecting the false narrative of racial difference and calling out the ugly lie of white supremacy.

By dismantling its damaging falsehoods — online, in the media, in schools, at work, in politics, and within ourselves.

And by working for truth, justice, and repair.

We recognize the extraordinary courage of the enslaved.

We honour their determination to be free.

Their quiet resilience, and their organized resistance.

Their uprisings and acts of open defiance.

Their unbreakable human spirit.

Now we must remove the persistent barriers that prevent so many people of African descent from exercising their rights and realizing their potential.

We must commit — fully and without hesitation — to human rights, equality, and the inherent worth of every person.

That's why the Second International Decade for People of African Descent and the African Union's Decade of Reparations are significant.

Let us use them to drive action in three critical areas:

Eradicating systemic racism.

Ensuring reparatory justice.

And accelerating inclusive development, with equal access to education, health, employment, housing, and a safe environment.

I welcome the steps some countries are taking to apologize for their role in the evil of slavery — and to join an honest dialogue about its lasting consequences.

But far bolder actions — by many more States — are needed.

This includes commitments to respect African countries' ownership of their own natural resources.

And steps to ensure their equal participation and influence in the global financial architecture and the UN Security Council.

I urge all Member States to become State Parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination if they have not already done it.

Excellencies,

We cannot continue to tolerate racial violence or bigotry.

We cannot keep letting inequality and injustice be ignored.

We must turn memory into progress and remembrance into responsibility.

The world we seek — rooted in freedom, equality, and justice — is within reach.

Let us honour the victims of the transatlantic trade not only with our words, but with our work.

Let us build a future where all human beings live and thrive in dignity.

Thank you.