

**PGA address at the commemorative meeting of the General Assembly  
to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the  
Victims of Slavery  
and the Transatlantic Slave Trade  
Wednesday, 25 March 2026 at 10:00 A.M.  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL**

“The closeness of the place... so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself... almost suffocated us.”

“I was soon put down under the decks... I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat... and wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me.”

These passages were written by Olaudah Equiano in his 18<sup>th</sup> century memoir.

Equiano, from what is now Nigeria, was stolen, shackled and shipped... like cargo...

Degraded.

Dehumanized.

Mr. Secretary General,

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Tens of millions of others like Equiano were ripped from their families, their countries and cultures, enslaved and sent to work in foreign lands.

To cotton fields here, in the United States.

To sugar and coffee plantations in European-controlled colonies in what is now Brazil, Barbados, and Jamaica, and dozens more places.

All far from home, far from family, far from life.

Countless perished before ever reaching land.

Those who survived were condemned to lives of servitude, enforced by the lash and the whip, denied their freedom, their dignity - even their names.

This is not only tragic history... the slave trade and slavery stand among the gravest violations of human rights in human history – an affront to the very principles enshrined in the Charter of our United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... themselves born, in part, from these injustices of the past.

Indeed, the memory of these atrocities is immortalized here at the United Nations in the Ark of Return and is commemorated in this Hall year after year.

Because while slavery itself has been abolished, its consequences endure—continuing to shape lives to this day.

For descendants, it is inherited... manifesting as poverty, as social discrimination, as under-representation in politics and business.

And for countries of origin – many of whom have representatives here today – it was a hollowing-out... the loss of entire generations who would, otherwise, have helped to sow the seeds of prosperity.

It was, to put it in colder terms, mass resource extraction.

Those of us whose predecessors did not have to live through these atrocities can never truly fathom how dire the conditions on those boats must have been... nor how hopeless and heartbroken the people.

But none of us could say we do not know the fate that they met.

We have seen this time and again in movies and television, in books and literature. We have heard it from friends.

Families torn apart...

women and men, children, slaving away in cotton fields and on plantations, under scorching heat...

women raped... men beaten... children born without hope of education or opportunity...

Addressing these injustices is therefore a moral imperative, rooted in a collective responsibility to confront past wrongs and to shape a more just future.

An imperative that requires storytelling – as Olaudah Equiano did in his memoir – and as Ms. Esther Phillips and Ms. Shahaddah Jack will do for us today.

An imperative that demands action – to challenge long-entrenched discrimination, raise awareness, and push for more just and inclusive societies.

And an imperative that calls for candid, even painful self-reflection and accountability...

On this point, I welcome the debate – however challenging it may be – on today's resolution, as it demonstrates that the UN, that our UN, is not shying away from hard conversations or topics... but addressing moral dilemmas head-on.

Excellencies,

While systemic slavery and the slave trade may be confined to the past, its roots of discrimination live on, as do grave violations of human rights.

Indeed, in the middle of the last century, the world saw slavery transformed from legally sanctioned to clandestine, with new forms of forced labour, human trafficking and debt bondage.

We must therefore be tireless in pursuit of justice, ensuring that we remain active participants in the pursuit of dignity, accountability, and equality across generations.

As Olaudah Equiano said, “the duty I owe to my country... will not suffer me to be silent.”

I thank you.