

PHOTO FEATURE: The enduring legacy of the transatlantic slave trade

24 March 2017 – The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in history and undeniably one of the most inhumane. According to the United Nations, over a 400-year period, the forcible extraction of Africans from their motherland was unprecedented in the annals of recorded human history

In 2007, the General Assembly declared 25 March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, to be observed annually.

The Day offers an opportunity to honour those who suffered at the hands of the brutal slavery system. It also aims to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice today.



: Annual Global Student Video Conference Commemorating Victims of Slavery.
Photo: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

This year the theme “Remember Slavery: Recognising the Legacy and Contributions of People of African Descent” recognises the horrors of the slave trade, while acknowledging that it led to an unprecedented transfer of knowledge and culture from Africa to the Americas, Europe and elsewhere.

Enslaved Africans brought with them advanced techniques of farming, working metals such as gold and iron, and boat building, among others. Those skills need to be remembered and celebrated.

“This is a story that has shaped almost every culture of the world,” Dr. Lonnie G. Bunch III, Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture told UN News.

Visitor’s take in “A Legacy of Black Achievement,” an exhibit at the UN featuring 21 figures who have personified the vital contributions that Africans and their descendants have made globally – from science and technology to political activism and the arts. Photo: UN News/ Elizabeth Scaffidi

This commemoration also acknowledges the enduring contributions of the vibrant African diaspora, which continue to enrich cultures across the globe.

Through music, dance, spirituality, sport, literature, art and cuisine, the diaspora has enabled societies to advance in science, technology, business, politics, law, social justice and international diplomacy, to name just a

few.

The theme for this year's International Day appropriately invites us to appreciate and honour the diaspora's tremendous achievements.

Looking back to move forward

According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), between the 15th and 19th centuries, the Island of Gorée, off the coast of Senegal, was the largest trading centre of slaves from the African coast.



The island of Gorée lies off the coast of Senegal, opposite Dakar. Photo: UNESCO/Richard Veillon

On the Island of Gorée, the architecture of the House of Slaves and its Door of No Return is characterized by the contrast between the dark slave quarters and the elegant houses of the slave traders. In 1962, it became a museum to memorialize the final exit point of the slaves from Africa. Today, the island is a symbol of human exploitation and a sanctuary for reconciliation.



'The Ark of Return' honours the memories of the estimated 15 million men, women and children who were victims of the forced extraction. Photo: UN News/UN/Elizabeth Scaffidi

[FEATURE: Cuba's rich musical heritage rooted in African rhythm](#)

24 March 2017 – For over 400 years, more than 15 million men, women and children were the victims of the tragic transatlantic slave trade – one of the darkest chapters in human history – commemorated by the United Nations every year on 25 March, the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Besides honouring and remembering those who suffered and died at the hands of the brutal slavery system, and to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice today, the day is also an opportunity to celebrate the contribution of the enslaved people to the societies in which they found themselves during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, with valuable skills and useful knowledge that they brought with them.

Among them, were the rhythms and musical traditions from their homeland,

which, according to historical experts attending an African Diaspora musical event at the UN on 14 April 2016, were essential to their survival and maintaining their identity.

As one travels through the African Diaspora, music and dance considered to be indigenous, is largely reminiscent of the African continent, as one may discover on a visit to countries like Cuba.

VIDEO: When Africans were brought centuries ago to Cuba to work on the sugar plantations, they also brought their cultural traditions including their music and instruments. When they arrived on the island, they embraced the tempo of the indigenous population and mixed it with their own African beat. Now young people are keeping the music of the enslaved alive in their own creations. *Credit: UNDP LAC*

Here, Joon Park, UNTV videographer and editor, gives his unique first person account of what it was like to report the story of Afro-Cuban music during a time of national mourning.

“Viva Fidel!” A middle aged man proudly shouted at our backs as we walked away after asking for directions. UNTV Producer, Mary Ferreira, and I were in Havana, Cuba, but it wasn’t just any ordinary day in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean Island nation. It was the day after Cuba lost its revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro and the city had come to a screeching halt.



The streets were filled with people weeping, paying tribute, and flaunting Fidel’s photo everywhere. The air was heavy with grief and uncertainty – sometimes almost too silent as a nine-day period of national mourning began. Photo: Joon Park / UNTV

As part of the United Nations’ Decade for People of African Descent campaign, we were in Cuba to document the influence that enslaved Africans and their descendants have on the island nation’s iconic music.

Experts estimate that more than 1.3 million slaves were brought to Cuba from across different regions of Africa. Their culture and religion, which are still present everywhere in the country, left a deep imprint on the island. To honor and remember those who suffered and died at the hands of the brutal slavery system, the United Nations designated 25, March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The day aims to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice.



Images of the late Fidel Casto are projected on a building surrounding Revolution Square in Havana during the nine day period of mourning after his death on 25, November, 2016. Photo: UNTV/ Joon Park

Like any other filming assignment, we knew to expect the unexpected – but this was different. The news of Castro’s death broke shortly before we boarded our flight and the number of international journalists at the airport indicated the weight of the historic news.

The quick turn of events posed a major obstacle for our production schedule. The Cuban government placed a ban on public entertainment during the mourning period which meant no live music playing throughout the nation for nine days.

Ferreira, my seasoned producer, swiftly changed course and pushed back filming of musicians to the following week and after much struggle and anxious waiting, we met an intriguing musician named, Ramon Garcia. He led an Afro-Cuban band called “Vocal Baobob.”



Ramon Garcia’s front porch becomes a stage for neighbours to play their Afro-Cuban music. Photo: Joon Park / UNTV

He openly gave us an invitation to his home where his band members regularly met and practiced. The ban was finally lifted and on the way to Mr. Garcia’s house our driver, Mondí, cranked up the volume on his car stereo.

“I try to connect it with Africa,” Mr. Garcia said. “There is no way that I would compose a song without a little bit of African rhythm.”

Within minutes his friends started to arrive; one with drumsticks in his pocket, the other with the African shekere (a West African percussion instrument made of dried gourd with beads woven into a net). Among them was Garcia’s cousin, Blanco, a contemporary hip hop rapper.

Blanco presented his latest work and Mr. Garcia quickly pulled out the batá drums. The batá drums are known as the sacred drums of Cuba, which were only played for the kings and for religious rituals in Africa.



Mr. Garcia plays the batá drums while his cousin, Blanco (right), raps his new song. Photo: Joon Park / UNTV

The front porch now became a stage as I readied my camera. The modern hip hop beat blasted out from the speakers. Slowly and naturally, like laying bricks, Mr. Garcia added the batá drum rhythm, another added the African shekere while the others started humming.

The all too familiar sound of contemporary hip hop was transformed into a mixture of African and Cuban melodies. And the first phrase of the song went, “Gracias Fidel!”

Outgoing UN peacekeeping chief praises reduced cost of operations, as agility increases

24 March 2017 – United Nations peacekeeping is becoming more agile and capable, the outgoing chief today said, even as the cost for each peacekeeper fell 16 per cent in recent years, dropping the entire budget of the blue helmets worldwide to around \$7.2 billion.

“It’s a lot of money at face value, but it’s 0.4 per cent of world military expenditure,” Hervé Ladsous, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told journalists in New York during his final briefing in this post.

“No other army has done what the United Nations has done over the past six years,” he added. The price for UN peacekeeping operations is currently \$7.2 billion, down from \$8.2 billion in 2011. “We diminished the cost per peacekeeper by 16 per cent without any diminution in the level of equipment.”

Comparing UN costs with the price tag for similar operations done by Governments alone, Mr. Ladsous said the UN operation cost was one-quarter of such operations.

Even as the costs have decreased, the agility and capacities of UN peacekeeping has strengthened, Mr. said Ladsous.

For example, the UN will shortly have a permanent capacity to deploy a vanguard brigade within 30 to 60 days, a “very useful” improvement over the current six to eight months to deploy a unit.

Technological advances, such as surveillance drones, balloons and cameras, are helping to bring “peacekeeping into the 21st century”

Another example of progress cited by Mr. Ladsous is the work under way to create a framework policy on intelligence which will save lives and allow peacekeepers “to do a better job.”

Technological advances, such as surveillance drones, balloons and cameras, are helping to bring “peacekeeping into the 21st century,” Mr. Ladsous added.

The geographic makeup of the peacekeepers is also changing, with an increased number of units from the so-called Global North, which incorporates countries from North America and Europe, as opposed to the Global South, which consists of South America, Asia and Africa.

“When I can in in 2011, 95 per cent of peacekeepers were from the Global South,” said Mr. Ladsous. “Now we have more countries from the Global North, from Europe, the European Union, in Mali and in Central Africa.”

Another key aspect of change in peacekeeping is their ability to adapt to the situation in each country and in creating exit strategies “because missions are not eternal,” Mr. Ladsous said.

He noted that three peacekeeping operations – in Côte D’Ivoire, Haiti and Liberia – are expected to close down this year.

‘Peacekeeping is about political solutions’

Despite the evolution of peacekeeping, its operations are often hampered by ongoing challenges, Mr. Ladsous noted. These include deployments to countries where there is no political process.

“Peacekeeping is about political solutions. The visible part is the soldiers, the uniforms, the policemen, but the reality is that we’re there to serve a political solution and quite often, it was the case in Mali initially, it was the case in CAR [Central African Republic] initially, there was no political solution in sight,” he said.

The Security Council “is not always as supportive as it should be” in such circumstances, nor in instances where UN ‘blue helmets’ should be sent.

One of the greatest challenges, however, is managing expectations of UN Member States, donor countries and other actors.

“The heart of the mandate is about protection of civilians. This is an extremely difficult issue. Yet we cannot have a peacekeeper behind every single citizen in the theatre,” said Mr. Ladsous.

While it is difficult to quantify, UN peacekeeping saves lives, the outgoing chief said. Pointing to South Sudan, where he just visited with the incoming chief, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Mr. Ladsous said the UN saved at least 220,000 lives in South Sudan alone.

Among other issues discussed in his final press briefing was the recent sexual exploitation and abuse report, asymmetrical attacks on peacekeepers, and uncooperative Governments hosting peacekeeping operations.

[Carwyn Connect heads to Barry](#)

The Carwyn Connect event will give local people the opportunity to meet the First Minister and ask him questions on any issues which affect them or their local community.

The session will take place between 6pm and 7.30pm at the Memo Arts Centre [Gladstone Road, Barry, CF62 8NA].

People are encouraged to register their interest in attending the free events online at the following link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cyfarfod-carwyn-carwyn-connect-tickets-29821069622>

Questions can be asked in a number of ways – they can be submitted when people arrive at the venue when doors open at 5.30pm; in advance via email on cabinetcommunications@wales.gsi.gov.uk or via Twitter using @fmwales with the hashtag #carwynconnect.

First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones said:

“Over the past year, I have travelled across the country to hear the views of local communities and answer the burning questions of the people of Wales.

“I would like to see as many people as possible at the event in Barry on 3 April, so if you have a question for me, want to raise issues affecting your community or have a great idea to make your home town a better place to live, come along to the event.

“We always discuss a wide variety of topics at these events, with questions about very local issues, to discussions about broad Government policy.

“This is your chance to meet and speak with me in person. I’m really looking forward to meeting you all.”

[News story: Baroness Anelay welcomes conclusions of UN Human Rights Council](#)

This was the first Human Rights Council (HRC) session since the UK’s successful re-election in November to serve a second term on the Council. The UK, represented at Ministerial level by my colleague Mr Sharma, Minister for Asia, played a leading role on a number of important issues, including Syria, Sri Lanka and South Sudan, as well as supporting on Burma, DPRK and Iran.

I welcome the adoption of a strong resolution on Syria, which includes renewing the mandate of the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI). The COI’s vital work highlights the unspeakable atrocities being perpetrated in Syria. We will continue to call for those responsible for violations and abuses of international law to be held to account. We remain concerned at the lack of

humanitarian access in Syria. We call on the regime to abandon its callous siege and starvation tactics and allow for the immediate, unhindered delivery of aid.

The report presented by the Human Rights Commission in South Sudan was deeply worrying. Following the peace agreement in August 2015, our hope that a transitional government of national unity might turn the tide of violence and begin the process of reconciliation looks to remain just that, a hope. So I welcome the adoption of a resolution, by consensus and with South Sudan's support, that will extend the Commission's work and strengthen its mandate.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report on Sri Lanka highlighted notable improvements in its human rights situation. But much remains to be done in order to address the legacy of Sri Lanka's armed conflict. I welcomed Sri Lanka co-sponsoring a resolution at this session, sending a strong signal on the importance the Government attaches to reconciliation and human rights. I urge the Government of Sri Lanka to provide the leadership required to fully deliver on its commitments, to develop a comprehensive, time-bound implementation strategy, and to give due consideration to the conclusions of the report of the Consultation Task Force on reconciliation mechanisms.

I thank the Special Rapporteur on Burma for her report to the Council, acknowledging the progress made by the Government in its first year, while outlining the complex human rights challenges that remain, in particular conflict-related violations in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin States. I welcome the establishment of an independent international Fact Finding Mission to look into recent human rights violations, and urge the Burmese authorities to cooperate fully. The UK stands ready to assist the Government in this endeavour and tackling other long-standing human rights challenges. I welcome the resolution on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which draws upon the recommendations made by the Group of Independent Experts on accountability. I hope the UN Special Rapporteur will continue the important task of developing an effective accountability framework with OHCHR in Seoul. The UK will continue to work with partners to maintain international pressure on the DPRK. I call on the Government of the DPRK to take credible steps to address the shocking human rights record and prioritise the welfare of the North Korean people above the country's nuclear and ballistic missile programme.

The situation in Libya remains a grave concern, as highlighted in the latest joint report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. I condemn the recent upsurge in violence between armed groups both in Tripoli and in the oil crescent, and am deeply concerned by reports of human rights abuses and violations by combatants in Benghazi and elsewhere. Those responsible must be held to account. I welcome the efforts of the Presidency Council and other mediators to de-escalate the situation and secure ceasefires. I urge calm on all sides to avoid further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the country. The UK welcomes the Council's support for the resolution and the emphasis on accountability.

I welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Iran. The human rights situation within the country is deeply worrying, in particular the continued execution of juvenile offenders. The newly introduced Charter on Citizen's Rights has the potential to make a positive impact and I urge Iran to grant immediate access to the Special Rapporteur so she can work with them to implement it.

I also welcome the adoption of the resolution on the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The human rights situation there is deeply concerning. For too long, international organisations have been denied access by the de facto authorities to these increasingly isolated territories. I welcome the opportunity for detailed and objective reporting by the OHCHR. I trust that the de facto authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia will grant the mandated access to the High Commissioner and his Office.

The UK once again played a strong role in supporting consensus on the adoption of both the EU's 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' resolution and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's text on the combating religious intolerance resolution. Tackling restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, and addressing intolerance and violent extremism should be a priority for all UN Member States.

This Council has once again reaffirmed the vital role that Human Rights Defenders play in promoting and protecting human rights. The ability of our citizens to hold governments to account, to freely express opinions, to hold and avow their beliefs, is an essential element of protecting our dignity as individuals and societies. In too many parts of the world that ability is being challenged or restricted. During this session, we have also seen attempts by some delegations to restrict the participation of NGOs at the Human Rights Council. Civil society must be able to engage actively in the United Nations – it is in the interests of the international community that they do so. Civil society furthers the UN's ideals, is a source of evidence and expertise, and supports the implementation of the UN's work. We restrict civil society space at our peril.

The UK remains committed to ensuring that the Council's Universal Periodic Review process delivers real improvements on human rights. I am pleased that the UK took the lead alongside Paraguay, Morocco and Brazil on a joint statement this session, outlining commitments to improve implementation of UPR recommendations. We were pleased to lead a joint statement on the Rule of Law, stressing that implementation is as important as the rules themselves.

Finally, in addition to our duty to address egregious human rights issues, I believe we must acknowledge positive developments. We should encourage a "race to the top" as States engage positively with the UN human rights system and support each other in translating political will into action. Alongside Colombia, the UK launched the "Race to the Top" initiative during the September HRC session. This session we delivered a joint statement on the initiative, which we were pleased enjoyed broad support.

At the start of our second term serving on the HRC, the UK was pleased to play a leading role on a number of critical dossiers. We look forward to

working with member states on consolidating progress made in this session.