

April 2, 2011

DPI/NGO Briefing

“The Transatlantic Slave Trade: The Living Legacies of  
30 Million Untold Stories”

Thursday, March 24, 2011, 10:15 A.M.- 12:15 P.M.

1. Background Information:

On December 17, 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution A/RES/62/122 designating March 25 as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This Day serves as a reminder that greater effort must be made to ensure that the history of the transatlantic slave trade is not forgotten and that it is used as a tool to combat discrimination and inequality.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, millions of Africans were forcibly removed from their homelands and shipped in bondage to colonies in North and South America and the West Indies. During the notorious “Middle Passage” across the Atlantic, they suffered unspeakable brutality, changed together in unsanitary and disease-ridden conditions. Those who survived were sold for considerable profit in a life of slavery.

Stripped of their names, identity, as well as all freedoms and human rights, they were reduced to commodities to be bought and sold or given away as gifts. They were forced to endure back-breaking labor under the harsh treatment of slave masters serving as a permanent supply of labor which generated immense wealth for business enterprises in America and Europe.

While the transatlantic slave trade was history’s largest forced migration and one of its greatest assaults on the integrity and dignity of human beings, details regarding this tragedy often remain hidden especially in school text books.

2. Moderator:

Ms. Maria-Luisa Chavez; Chief, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information.

3. Opening Statement:

H.E. Mr. Raymond O. Wolfe; Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations.

4. Speakers:

Dr. Michael A. Gomez; Professor of History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University.

Dr. Abena Busia; Director of the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ADSWAD) and the in-coming Chair of the Department of Women and Gender Studies

Dr. Alvin Thompson; Professor Emeritus of History of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados

5. The Moderator, Ms. Maria-Luisa Chavez, welcomed us and introduced each of the speakers including including H. E. Wolfe who made the Opening Statement with their backgrounds. She indicated that this briefing will present untold stories that may be used as a means to accurately teach awareness and understanding of the Transatlantic Slave trade. This briefing will also examine the role of oral traditions, particularly those of enslaved Africans, in handling down lessons and preserving history.

March 25, 2011 is the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This briefing has been held by the United Nations in remembrance of the International Day of Remembrance since 2007

6. Video:

A video was shown at this time to present a live video visit of the slave trade. Great Britain abolished slaves in 1772. The video presented the author on her presentation of the slave trade. The history for blacks was distorted. The video described slaves in the Americas where only blacks were enslaved. It showed advertisements used for "Slaves for Sale" auctions. This was the worst form of slavery.

7. The opening statement was made by H.E. Mr. Raymond Wolfe. He has served as Chairman of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly from September 2007 to September 2008; and one of the Vice-Presidents of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly from September 2008 to September 2009.

Prior to his appointment, Ambassador Wolfe held the post of Under-Secretary for Multilateral Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade in his native Jamaica. In June 2004, he was appointed as Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and subsequently served as President of the Council of the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Authority (July 2007) and President of the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of State Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (June 2006).

From 1998 to 2003, he was Jamaica's High Commissioner to Canada, and for several years before that he held consecutive senior positions in the Jamaican Foreign Ministry, including Director of the European Affairs Department and Director of the Africa, Asia and Pacific Affairs Department. Ambassador Wolfe joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in July 1973.

He indicated that five separate resolutions have been adopted on slavery by the United Nations. In 2007 the United Nations agreed on a Permanent Memorial to the victims of the Slave Trade. The Permanent Memorial was supported by 147 Nations. The education of young people on the subject of Slavery was adopted by a United Nations Resolution in 2007.

8. The first speaker, Dr. Michael A. Gomez, indicated that 500 years ago, Africans made their first travel to the Americas with Columbus. The expansion of agriculture in the Americas was a disaster for Africans as there was no labor for them in the Americas. The blacks were the first workers to arrive. 45 percent arrived in Brazil, 25 percent arrived in the Caribbean and 20 percent arrived in the United States.

In a composite to the Atlantic Trade the European experience was for female blacks. The Africans in the Americas continued to interface with their African decedents. The transatlantic ties of blacks will deepen with time.

9. Questions/Answers to Dr. Michael A. Gomez (He had to leave early).

Those blacks that were transported to European areas were mostly for domestic purposes, Africa is very large. Some communities there still have servants in their societies. These societies still have servant slave trade.

10. The second speaker, Dr. Abena Busia, is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature and the Associate Director in the Department of English and Comparative Literature and the Associate Director of the Center for African Studies at Rutgers University. Dr. Busia received her Bachelor's Degree in English Language and Literature at St Anne's College at Oxford, England in 1976, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Social Anthropology (Race Relations) at St. Anthony's College in 1984.

She lectures and publishes widely on the African Diaspora literature as well as culture and curriculum transformation for race and gender. She is the co-editor of "Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women", and of "Beyond Survival: African Literature & The Search for New Life.

She co-directed and co-edited the two decades long “Women Writing Africa, a cultural reconstruction.

Dr. Busia has published two volumes of poems, “ Testimonies of Exile” and “Traces of Life”. She is the Founder of the Busia Foundation, the Busia Foundation International and the International Culture Exchange Center.

Her organizations has been able to define and publish details of the African Diaspora. She came across a letter in 1972 that defined the problems of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The letter described the slave problems in Africa. The letter was probably written in 1772. The letter described the slave trade in Africa.. It presented details on the African Slave Trade established by European Nations in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The letter represents an excellent item to view and understand the world in Africa during the author’s time. She read the letter to us.

11. The last speaker, Dr. Alvin Thomson, Has taught African and Caribbean History at the university level for over thirty years, and has also supervised several graduate students. He is the author of numerous books and publications including “A Documentary History of Slavery in Berbice (1796-1834)”, “Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas (2006)”, and his most recent publication “Confronting Slavery: Breaking through the corridors of Silence (2010)”.

Dr. Thompson has been the recipient of many awards, honors and distinctions such as the 2008 Lifetime Award from the Pan African Commission of Barbados for his contribution to the study of African History and Culture. Dr. Thompson holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of the West Indies.

During his presentation photos a video was shown of the history of slavery in Africa entitled “The Victims of Slavery by Dr. Thompson”. This was the living legacy of slavery as presented by Dr. Thompson .

12. Questions/Answers:

12.1 H.E. Mr. Raymond O. Wolfe; 147 nations at the United Nations support the Permanent Memorial . They are working to obtain the support for the Memorial of all 192 nations.

12.2 H.E. Mr. Raymond O. Wolfe; They are in the process of negotiating for the Permanent Memorial. It is a Global Competition and must be transparent. This is a United Nations Project so they must be careful.

12.3 H.E. Mr. Raymond O. Wolfe; The resolution adopted in 2007 comments to the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

12.4 Dr. Abena Busia; All the United Nations Panels that they have been appointed to the members address the slave trade.

12.5 Dr. Alvin Thompson; Well over a dozen organizations address the Slave Trade.

12.6 H.E. Mr. Raymond O. Wolfe; The General Assembly has passed numerous resolution that deal with the Slave Trade.

12.7 Dr. Alvin Thompson; Enslaved people were the primary fighters for freedom in the Americas. The number of people involved exceeded 30, 000 people. For 300 years the Brazilian Government has had a slave trade problem.

12.8 Dr. Abena Busia; We must trace the history of who we as blacks are.

Questions/Answers (cont'd):

12.9 Dr. Alvin Thompson; At the national level the greatest thing that can be done is to erect a "Permanent Memorial". We have to teach the public what the memorial means. We also need a gallery that people can visit on slavery and where they can also bring their children to educate them on the slave trade.

12.10 Dr. Abena Busia; When she first started teaching she was teaching to a mixed class. She asked her students on why Martin Luther King was jailed in 1962. No one could answer. We have to teach them what happened then. Monuments must be listed that includes an African Monument in New York City and explain it to all the students in school. We must become more active on this issue.

12.11 Dr. Alvin Thompson; There were Africans who were collaborators in the Slave Trade. Many Jews also collaborated with the Nazis. We must put greater blame on the Europeans on the Slave Trade. There is a living legacy of 30 million untold stories.

12.12 Dr. Abena Busia; It is very important that we recognize the importance of this issue. of the Transatlantic Slave Trade . The Transatlantic Slave Trade was abolished in 1807 but slavery in the Americas continued.

12.13 Dr. Alvin Thompson; Slave ships threw slaves overboard to be able to collect insurance. They could not collect insurance if they died on the ship. Slaves worked twenty hours a day. Slaves in the new world had no rights.

12.14 Dr. Abena Busia; All civilizations had slavery. The question of reparations is a difficult issue. This issue was brought up in Nigeria. Those that participated in the Slave Trade became very rich. In real terms the sum cannot be paid by any country.

PDC George Weinstein  
National U\*N Chairman