

April 5, 2008

DPI/NGO BRIEFING ON  
LEST WE FORGET: BREAKING THE SILENCE ON THE  
TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

And

Premiere of the Documentary

THE SLAVE ROUTE: A GLOBAL VISION

March 27, 2008, 10:00 AM – 1:30 PM

1. Background Information:

The event today commenced with the premiere of the documentary film Titled “The Slave Route: A Global Vision. This was followed by the “Meet the Producer”. This event was held in observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 27 and of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade on March 25.

2. Films; “The Slave Route: A Global Vision” and “Meet the Producer”:

These films were made by UNESCO. It covered the early slave trade including pictures of the early slave trade. Historians in the film spoke about the history of the early slave trade. They noted that integration through out the world was not only limited to the slave trade.

The slave trade started 1500 years ago from Africa. The film showed the harsh treatment that they received. African descendents of slaves still exist in Iran today. They are still found around the Indian Ocean as merchandise. There were also slaves from India.

Madagascar was an important location for the slave trade. The film also showed where black Africans ruled over non blacks in India. Today there is a major presence of black Africans in India. The Balkan Islands enslaved both whites and blacks.

In the North African area many blacks were leaders. The European slave trade was started in Portugal and England in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Great Britain abolished slavery in 1772. But there were over 20,000 slaves there. In the Americas only Africans were enslaved. The films showed how their villages were built in Africa.

One-fifth of those slaves being brought over to the Americas perished because of the conditions that existed on the ships. Slave only seven years old lived under harsh conditions. Black Africans in Africa fought against slavery.

Plantation owners in the Americas received compensation for the loss of free trade slavery workers. Haiti became the only country that was overthrown by slaves. The British Parliament in 1807 enacted legislation that abolished slavery. Plantation owners received compensation for the loss of free trade slavery workers. Haiti had to pay several million dollars for the abolishment of their slave trade.

One million Europeans colonized the Americas. There were eight and one-half million African slaves. The slave trade by Spain in the Caribbean was late but was intense. In the late 1819 century eighty percent of the population was African. Fifty percent of the slaves on ships were children. France on May 19, 2001 was the first nation to recognize the crime of the slave trade.

Historians write that slaves contributed to the Americas (Culture, religion, customs, music, especially in Cuba). Africans has expertise in sugar farming, metallurgy and city planning. Blacks are still stigmatized.

Moderator:

Mr. Eric Falt, Director of DPI's Outreach Division

Speakers:

Dr. Sheila Walker, producer of the two films shown

H.E. Mr. Raymond Wolfe, Permanent Representative  
Of Jamaica to the United Nations

H.E. Ms. Karen Pierce, Deputy Permanent Representative  
Of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

Mr. Howard Dodson, Director, Schomburg Center  
for Research in Black Culture since 1984

Mr. William D. Payne, Former Assemblyman,  
New Jersey Legislature

3. The moderator, Mr. Falt introduced each of the speakers with their backgrounds. he reiterated the importance of this session and noted some key facts from the two films.

4. The keynote speaker, Dr. Sheila Walker, has produced a number of works, documentaries, and achievements on the aspects of slavery. She is an Anthropologist – not an Historian. She stated that in 1808 the United States Constitution said no more slaves but the last slave ship arrived in 1859. Brazil legislated this in 1859 but the last slave ship to arrive in Brazil was in 1888.

She ended by stating that we need to stay focused on the entire slave trade globally.

5. Questions/Answers (Dr. Sheila Walker):

5.1 The French abolished slavery in 1793.

5.2 The boats arriving in the Americas originated from Europe. Everyone there was involved in the slave trade not just European coastal countries. Africans paid for their slave work for centuries.

5.3 These films were originally made for UNESCO. No decision has been made on the films will be used.

5.4 There will be a public apology first then they will be followed with action by telling an accurate story of the history of slavery.

5.5 There was a pre-Columbian African presence in the Americas.

5.6 There are African descendents in South America. Some say they do not exist there but this is not true. Africans should not have a debt.

6. The next speaker, Ambassador Wolfe, indicated that the slave trade must be recognized as a crime against humanity. He read statements from a paper from the University of West Virginia on the Slave Project that shed more light on the subject and a professor from the University who prepared the paper

7. The next speaker, Ambassador Karen Pierce, has played an active roll in combating the slave trade worldwide in spite of her background. She paid tribute to those who have worked to abolish the slave trade.

She has joined the Memorial Committee on the Slave Trade and pledged 20,000 pounds of United Kingdom money to them She stated that there was still much more to be done.

Ms. Pierce has been working hard on the complete abolition of the slave trade worldwide. There is a museum in Liverpool on the slave trade, which in ancient times, Liverpool was a slave port. The museum was opened in 2006 to combat human trafficking. It is still a global problem. Millions of people worldwide still live in conditions of slavery.

Slavery is a crime against humanity.

#### 8. Questions/Answers (Ambassador Pierce):

8.1 She and her organization has pledged seven billion dollars for education on the slave trade in all schools. It also includes the Holocaust Program.

8.2 The education of the students on the slave trade and holocaust education is compulsory and includes exams on both subjects.

8.3 Some schools also teach African history but this is at the discretion of the schools.

9. The next speaker, Ambassador Wolfe, has been working for a permanent memorial "Less We Forget". The commemorative event for this was held Sunday, March 25, 2008. He indicated that there should be something at the United Nations for the victims of the slave trade. A permanent memorial would be one answer. The permanent memorial should reflect on the tragedy of slavery

United Nation's resolution 62/1-202 on the "Abolishment of Slavery" was adopted December, 2007. The resolution addresses the issue of acknowledgement. Permanent memoirs are now a United Nation's project. Many countries have signed up for this. The country of Jamaica is the chair of this project.

10. The fourth speaker, Mr. Dodson, has promoted the Schomburg Center on the History of African Descent. He indicated that the administration of the United States Government has turned a deaf ear to this project. When the project was started, the United States was not part of UNESCO. His organization and others are trying to bring the United States government in to support these efforts.

Mr. Dodson stated that ninety percent of activities in the United Nations are unknown in New York City and the surrounding area. His organization is also trying to get the people of New York City to visit the burial grounds of slaves.

The Statue of Liberty was the first location presenting the story of the slave trade in the North of the United States. All the thirteen colonies in the United States were slave trade centers. Ninety percent of blacks have no wealth or assets.

Blacks have not been able to accumulate any wealth. Up until 1960 blacks could not buy land or gain assets in New York City. Black people in Columbia mine gold, etc but have no assets.

11. The last speaker, former Assemblyman Payne, served in the New Jersey legislature from 1998 to 2008. In 2002, New Jersey signed into law the teaching of slavery in Jersey schools. He quoted from the Constitution the rights of all people for Independence. But blacks have not always had this right.

The state of New Jersey had the largest number of slaves (12,000). It was the last State to sign the freedom of slaves document in 1876. He indicated that an apology from all mankind was required and that it is never too late to apologize for the slave trade. Assemblyman Payne prepared a resolution on this and received a lot of criticism on his resolution.

Insurance companies benefited from insuring slaves. In January 2008, New Jersey was the fifth state to pass legislation regarding slavery. He indicated that the next step is to discuss reimbursement. This passed the New Jersey Senate and Assembly.

Assemblyman Payne now discussed his experiences as a student in New Jersey grammar schools on text problems on black and white. The only heroes were white. The schools did not teach the black experience. He feels that we must rewrite the true history of this country.

12. Questions/Answers:

12.1 Ambassador Wolfe: It is critical that the Caribbean Countries lead the effort for a permanent memorial at the United Nations on black slavery. After that is done, then copies can be done elsewhere.

12.2 Mr. Payne: The black caucus is working hard to overcome administration denials in the United States.

12.3 Mr. Dodson: The black caucus is working on a congressional resolution on this resolution.

12.4 Dr. Sheila Walker: We cannot forget if we know. We have the right to know the truth. Schools generally do not teach anything on this subject. We must all have responsibility for getting the information. Students must become critical thinkers. There are African descendents in all the Caribbean Countries.

12.5 Mr. Dodson: Each generation must discover what its mission is and then fulfill it. His schools inform students about this subject six hours a week. Their students have ask why are you not teaching us about this.

12.6 Ambassador Wolfe: Computers and television have encouraged us to address this subject more than books do. Books do not exist for a history of the slave trade. There is no good book store for this.

12.7 Ambassador Pierce: We must get a black history to everyone to provide the needed information. He encouraged each of us to use our backgrounds to achieve what our contribution on this can be.

12.8 Mr. Payne: We have been taught early that you cannot fight city hall. Dr. Bunch had overcome this world's problems as a black. We must also resolve the Middle East conflict. If you truly believe then you can overcome.

PDC George Weinstein  
National UN Chairman