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Sad history of slave trade can help mankind learn common humanity – UN official



UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova

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The head of the United Nations agency tasked with conserving the world’s cultural heritage today exhorted mankind to learn the history of the dehumanizing transatlantic slave trade to discover their common humanity and intensify the fight against prejudice and racial discrimination.

“Each of us must be empowered to learn about this past and to reclaim it, as a necessary step in building new common ground,” said Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), in a [message](#) to mark the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.

“Managing cultural diversity and fighting prejudice and racial discrimination raise high stakes in globalizing world,” she said, adding that the Day was an opportunity to reflect on the tragedy of slave trade, and to pay tribute to those who struggled for its abolition in the light of the universal recognition of human rights.

This year’s observance of the Day carries special importance in that it is also the 10th anniversary of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance which was held in Durban, South Africa, where the slave trade was acknowledged as a crime against humanity, Ms. Bokova noted.

The year has also been declared the International Year for People of African Descent. “This is a chance to examine the effects of the slave trade, whose ignominious practice has in part shaped the face of modern society, across all regions of the world. This history can also nourish our thinking about our multicultural and multiethnic societies today,” she said.

UNESCO has been playing a leading role in fostering understanding and recognition of the slave trade. Since the establishment of the Slave Route project in 1994, the agency has worked to break the silence on the slave trade and slavery.

The agency will today launch an international design competition for the permanent memorial to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade that will be constructed at UN Headquarters in New York. The memorial will symbolise universal recognition of the tragedy that befell not only Africans and people of African descent, but humanity as a whole.

It is estimated that more than 12.5 million Africans were transported to the Americas and the Caribbean and enslaved.

The Day will be marked with various events across the world that range from a workshop on the slave trade for educators in Ghana, exhibitions in Senegal, Argentina and Granada, to a symposium in Trinidad and Tobago whose theme is “The contribution of people of African descent in the development of Caribbean society.”

In the United Kingdom, several museums will have commemorative events, including exhibitions and panel discussions.

In Canada, the Black Coalition of Quebec has chosen “A History to Discover” as the theme of week-long events in Montreal that began last week.

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