



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Message from Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, 23 August 2017

The date 23 August marks the anniversary of the 1791 insurrection of enslaved men and women in the western part of the island of Santo Domingo, which, on proclaiming its independence reverted to its original Amerindian name: Haiti. The uprising conveyed a universal demand for freedom that transcends all limits of time and space. It speaks to humanity as a whole, without distinction of origin or religion, and continues to resonate now with undiminished force.

By means of International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, UNESCO aims to recall the crucial importance of the transmission of history in order to shed light on the fight against all forms of oppression and racism today. The 1791 uprising triggered a shockwave that has set the course of peoples' liberation struggles and of human and civil rights movements for over 200 years. It crystallized the issues, concepts and principles with which it is essential to be familiar in the present fight against modern slavery and human trafficking. We are counting on the teaching of this history to place tomorrow's citizens on the path to peace and dignity.

By proclaiming the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), the United Nations General Assembly hopes to eradicate the social injustice that is a legacy of that history and to combat racism and racial discrimination. Freedom of rights, hard-won by force, must be translated into real freedom through public policies that guarantee to people of African descent the full exercise of economic, social and political equality, and full and equal participation in society. The 1791 uprising, like so many others across the world, shows us the way, but the path ahead is still long.

In this spirit, at its most recent session, the World Heritage Committee approved the inclusion in the World Heritage List of Mbanza Kongo, Vestiges of the Capital of the former Kingdom of Kongo (Angola) and the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site (Brazil), thereby acknowledging their outstanding universal value. In 2015, the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site was recognized as a site of memory associated with the UNESCO Slave Route Project: Resistance, Liberty, Heritage. Recognition of this heritage is decisive in raising the awareness of the general public, educating young people and in the processes of conciliation and social cohesion.

This effort is the eternal effort for the comprehensive affirmation of human dignity, and UNESCO devotes to it the full force of its mandate, through education, culture, sharing of information and scientific research, which help to construct in the minds of all ramparts against racism and prejudice. The teaching of the General History of Africa, and the Slave Route programme are examples of this. Ignorance is our enemy: it is used as an alibi by the indifferent who state that "we cannot change anything", and sanctions the lies of those who claim that "they did not know". Everyone must know the scale of the crime of the slave trade, the millions of lives broken and the impact on the fate of continents up to this very day. Everyone must

be fully informed of the struggle that led to its abolition, so that together we can build societies that are fairer, and thus freer.