

ADDRESS

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE HAZEL MANNING
MINSTER OF EDUCATION**

AND

**PRESIDENT, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
UNESCO**

Opening Ceremony - “Freedom Road”

**Commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic
Trade in Enslaved Africans**

Annual UNESCO ASPnet Youth Symposium

Mason Hall Government Secondary School, TOBAGO

Wednesday 22nd August 2007

It is a pleasure to be with you once again in beautiful, tranquil Tobago. I am assured that school repair is progressing as planned and your schools will be ready to reopen at the start of the new term.

But I am not here today to dwell on such matters. However, I must congratulate the two young cricketers from Bon Accord Primary School who have been chosen for National Cricket team. Their talents and success, like that of Dwight Yorke and countless others give testimony to the strength of the legacy of ancestors who survived enslavement.

So here we are in Tobago - an island with a rich and exciting history and one whose achievements bear witness to that proud legacy of struggle, sacrifice and survival of the ancestors, over what the United Nations describes as, and I quote:

“...the worst violations of human rights in the history of humanity, bearing in mind the scale and duration” of the Trans Atlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans

Let us therefore stand for a moment of silence in tribute to the ancestors.

The choice of Tobago is most fitting as a venue for this Freedom Road Youth Symposium, to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of this trade – a story that while horrifying, is at the same time fascinating in its complexity and liberating when made known.

Tomorrow - August 23rd - is the day set aside by the United Nations for countries world wide to observe the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.

You may wonder why UNESCO has taken an interest in the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans and in the African Diaspora. As a specialised agency of the United Nations, UNESCO promotes the creation of a culture of peace within civil society.

This culture of peace requires the observance and safeguarding of human rights and justice through an interdisciplinary approach using:-

- Education
- The natural sciences
- The social and human sciences

- Culture and
- Communications and information.

It is through this interdisciplinary approach that activities and international projects are initiated. Youth Symposia such as this on the abolition of the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans are among the projects that UNESCO endorses and encourages for the promotion of a culture of peace.

The international commemoration of the abolition of the trade in enslaved Africans began this year on March 25th, the anniversary of the signing of the British law that put an end to the trade in English speaking countries.

Ceremonies to mark the event during the year have been many and varied, for example:-

- At the United Nations in New York there was an exhibition and a special gathering of the UN General Assembly
- In Britain people walked for miles in yokes and shackles
- Here in Trinidad and Tobago we adopted the theme “*Freedom Road*” for our six month long journey that began in March and ends in September.

So far, Trinidad and Tobago has hosted a number of activities including:-

- A Conference organised by the Association of Caribbean Historians
- A lecture series of the Department of History at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine
- Special observances at the Emancipation Village and
- Today we launch this youth symposium

Not many of us know the history surrounding the transatlantic slave trade - not many know that that it was on the night of 22nd into the 23rd August, 1791 in Saint Domingue (now Haiti) that an uprising or rebellion of the enslaved Africans on that island took place...and that this event would play a crucial role in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

More than 200 years later, in 1993, Haiti and some African countries were able to gain approval at the UNESCO General Conference for the implementation of *The Slave Route Project* - a project

that explores, by means of scientific work, the underlying causes, forms and consequences of enslavement.

Five years later in 1998, the 23rd August was proclaimed the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.

In this way UNESCO and its Member States pay tribute and preserve for posterity the memory of the tireless struggle of enslaved Africans for their freedom.

And so every year the UNESCO Associated Schools Project network (ASPnet) schools are invited to collaborate with cultural institutes, historians, other specialists and the Media to observe the 23rd August through activities that:-

- Promote awareness of the Transatlantic Trade in enslaved Africans
- Increase understanding of the Transatlantic Trade and enslavement, its causes and consequences
- Draw attention to modern forms of slavery
- Encourage solidarity with the peoples that have suffered because of enslavement and
- Celebrate the African Diaspora

The UNESCO ASP net activities are wide and varied and include:-

- Visits to exhibitions on the Transatlantic Slave Trade
- Lectures by historians, seminars, debates and other ceremonies of remembrance
- Pilgrimages to places of memory and 'slave trails' in cooperation with museums
- Theatrical performances by students
- Dissemination of the UNESCO Director-General's annual message
- Poetry festivals dedicated to the Slave Trade and its Abolition and
- Youth Symposia such as this annual event of the ASP net in Trinidad and Tobago.

This annual youth symposium grew out of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Project that was launched in 1998 to “break the silence” surrounding the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Every year, the Trinidad and Tobago National Commission for UNESCO and the ASP net recognise the need to build awareness in each succeeding generation so that our youth may:-

- More fully comprehend the past
- Understand the present and
- Prepare a better future as they contribute to the freeing the world of stereotypes, enslavement, injustice, discrimination, racism and prejudice.

For the past four years, the National Commission for UNESCO, the ASP net, UNESCO Clubs and the Ministry of Education, have held an August Youth Symposium:-

- In 2004 the symposium focused on The African Diaspora and the need to break the silence
- In 2005, the theme was ‘Up from Slavery’ highlighting the achievements and contribution of enslaved Africans to the building of the modern world
- In 2006, the symposium celebrated the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the trade in Trinidad and Tobago and
- This year, we celebrate international recognition of the abolition of the trade in enslaved Africans in English speaking countries.

This year, we also add another major partner - the Tobago House of Assembly, demonstrating the significance that has been placed on this activity. We welcome Tobago’s partnership and we commend the efforts of all who have worked to make this symposium a reality.

They deserve our applause!!!

The Director-General of UNESCO Koshiro Matsuura in his message for the observance of this year’s International Day, 23rd August, states, and I quote:-

“...we must all step up our efforts to ensure that the history of the slave trade and of slavery takes its rightful place in civic education programmes, school textbooks and audiovisual productions”.

As we in Trinidad and Tobago step up our efforts in the area of curriculum reform, we are guided by a Cabinet decision that has made the teaching of history mandatory at all levels.

We realise however that many of our teachers require the necessary preparation and confidence to facilitate student learning about the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans.

Towards this end, the Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO will host an international workshop for educators in November this year, the theme of which will be:-
“Teaching the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans.”

I am aware of the very successful professional development month conducted for teachers in Tobago. I therefore want to encourage you to include the teaching of the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans in your discussions and the development of the project in your schools. This project aims to improve the teaching of History by telling the whole story of the Transatlantic Slave Trade - the suffering it caused and its social, cultural and economic impact on the Atlantic world.

This Transatlantic Slave Trade Project is the first international endeavour to mobilise schools in Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe to develop new educational approaches while promoting intercultural dialogue between young people.

I would like to urge Tobago to strengthen its UNESCO ASP net, which now has 4 secondary schools, by expanding to the primary level so that more of your youth can be involved in educational and awareness activities on this fundamental aspect of our history.

I am of the belief that many possibilities exist for us as a Nation to be on the cutting edge of this new wave of globalization, if there is enlightened understanding of the wave of globalization that brought our ancestors to these islands and their experiences.

In closing, I want to appeal to the students who are participating in this symposium to express yourselves fully and demonstrate your creative talents.

You are creating history as your input will inspire and contribute to the development of teaching-learning strategies and curriculum materials for this aspect of our history.

You can inform new approaches to the teaching of the subject of History in our school curriculum that makes learning about our past interesting and exciting!

Enjoy this experience, and I look forward to the outcome of this symposium. As President of the National Commission for UNESCO, I will continue to support initiatives that educate and enlighten our people on the legacy of ancestors.