



Opening remarks by Tonni Brodber:
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to the Government of Barbados' Commemorative
Discussion on the UN International Day for the
Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.
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The Transatlantic Slave Trade was one of the darkest chapters in human history, a period marked by unspeakable suffering, exploitation, and the dehumanisation of millions of enslaved Africans and their descendants.

However, even in this period, the light of humanity continued to shine, and in the Caribbean as well. The fact that the systems are now ours to create reform - whether Bussa, Nanny of the Maroons or Toussaint L'Ouverture - the road to freedom was paved by those who survived, those who thrived, those who knew that with their efforts their descendants would know more, do more and have an opportunity for better, for equality and to paraphrase another great striver 'they knew they would overcome because the arc of the moral universe may be long, but it bends toward justice.'

What is Freedom without justice, without peace? The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says: *'Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.'*

Now this beautiful Caribbean archipelago was at the centre of the Transatlantic slave trade. Some 40 percent of enslaved Africans were shipped to the Caribbean Islands¹. Perhaps our feet take flight especially in the Olympics and beyond, because in our DNA we are aware of what our ancestors ran from and what we are running towards. Perhaps this drive also inspired the actions of those born in and influenced by these small islands, like Shirley Chisholm, Marcus Garvey and Kwame Ture, Alexander Hamilton, Sarah Ann Gill, Nanny of the Maroons, Dame Nita Barrow - as well as the many known and unknown Caribbean born and influenced freedom seekers.

¹ Sherman-Peter, A. 2022. The Legacy of Slavery in the Caribbean and the Journey Towards Justice.



The Transatlantic slave trade was ostensibly about free and unvalued labour. This labour was policed by violence. I am excited tonight to hear from Dame Graça Machel about the invisible and visible labour that we see on the road to freedom.

As Audrey Lorde told us that “the master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house”.

What kind of freedom is built on the invisible labour of one group? When else is biology used to inform freedom, to access opportunities to education, employment and health care?

Some of you may know me in my other hat as the Representative of UN Women Multi-Country Office Caribbean. The struggle for gender equality is deeply entwined with the fight against the legacies of slavery. It is a direct continuation in the fight for freedom which has defined the Caribbean’s history. Women have not only worked closely with men to contribute significantly to building the road to freedom in the Caribbean and across the world through challenging

patriarchal structures that have sought to limit their rights and opportunities; while tirelessly fighting for equality, justice, and dignity.

We are still on the Road to Freedom. The root causes of the Transatlantic slave trade and colonialism remain. Many are not yet enjoying the right to life without fear of violence, even violence in the home. We have an opportunity to learn from all who came before us and to see and shine light on the invisible work being done.

So while the colonial legacies and systems of racism and discrimination are the lived realities still of Afro-descendants and all people, especially marginalised persons, yet we have created a reality marked by joy at times, success and through it all, resilience. Our ancestors survived so that we could thrive.

Associated with the sun, a phoenix obtains new life by rising from the ashes of its predecessor. Haven't we all? The United Nations was born from the understanding that peace is every human being's right. Our countries standing together for peace is the answer.

Peace is the *raison d'être* of the United Nations, and we know at this stage, that it is the one thing missing from many places in the world, not only in countries and communities, but in homes. Peace is the way out of crises; it is a rally cry. It is the path to freedom.

I was lucky enough not only to have worked in South Africa, but to also have been raised by a South African man. My bonus father was born in Apartheid, and he was born to benefit from Apartheid as an Afrikaans man. He taught me that no matter how you benefit from unequal systems, you must be willing to risk everything for equality. It is always the answer, and it is the key to the freedom we aspire. Because ***"When we come to it" ... as Maya Angelou said:***

*... "We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear*

*When we come to it
We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it."*