

**Message from the Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the
International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition
23 August 2005**

By 29 C/Resolution 40, the General Conference of UNESCO proclaimed 23 August of every year *International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition*. This date was chosen in reference to the insurrection on the night of 22-23 August 1791 in Saint-Domingue (today Haiti and Dominican Republic) which was to play a pivotal role in the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the emancipation of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The *International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition* aims to make the slave trade part of the world's collective memory. In line with the objectives of the intercultural "Slave Route" project, the day provides us with an occasion for common reflection, not only on the historical causes, the implications and the modes of operation of this tragedy, but also on the lasting consequences in Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean – and indeed the whole world.

The slave trade, slavery and abolition belong to history. They are not, however, solely of the past. They enable us to comprehend a present marred by racism and discrimination handed down from that tragic chapter in history. They also open up questions about the future and prompt us to reflect on the construction of new forms of citizenship heedful of our increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural societies. They also reveal how, despite the persistence of the most radical stereotypes and application of the most brutal discriminatory policies, an unexpected step towards intercultural communication has been taken that hence offers a fresh chance for dialogue.

The commemoration of this day of 23 August assumes a special meaning this year; it is taking place after the events that marked 2004, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly "International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition", which was widely celebrated the world over and raised great hopes. It also coincides with the tenth anniversary of the "Slave Route Project", whose evaluation showed the interest and expectations raised the world over.

The dynamic created by the International Year invites us to intensify efforts to ensure that the slave trade and slavery are seen as a tragedy affecting the whole of humankind. UNESCO has not only the duty to remember but also an ethical obligation to act as watchdog.

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