

August 23: International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition

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While reviewing and reflecting on the origins of this day, we may find some insights in *Laudato Si'*.

“The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.”



“Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.”

The “vision of ‘might is right’ has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all.”

The International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition is intended to inscribe the tragedy of the slave trade in the memory of all peoples. It offers an opportunity for collective consideration of the historic causes, the methods and the consequences of this tragedy, and for an analysis of the interactions to which it has given rise between Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean.

The beginning of the end of the slave trade can be traced to events in Haiti. The night of 22 to 23 August 1791, in Santo Domingo (today Haiti and the Dominican Republic), there was an uprising that would play a crucial role in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. This led to the creation and independence in 1804 of what is now Haiti. Ignorance or concealment of this and other major historical events constitutes an obstacle to mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation among peoples.

In light of this history, UNESCO has thus decided to break the silence surrounding the slave trade and slavery that have concerned all continents and caused the great upheavals that have shaped our modern societies.

Over four centuries, more than 18 million people were forcefully removed from Africa to the Americas (including the Caribbean) and Europe. For those who survived the horrific middle passage, thousands of them would later perish as a result of the cruel and inhumane treatment meted out to them and from the appalling conditions in which they had to exist on plantations.

**Slaves to America - - Sugar, tobacco, cotton to Europe - -
Textiles, rum, manufactured goods to Africa**



The history of the slave trade and slavery created a storm of rage, cruelty and bitterness that has not yet abated. It is also a story of courage, freedom and pride in newfound freedom. All of humanity is part of this story, in its transgressions and good deeds. The slave uprising in the Caribbean over 200 years ago represents a symbolic victory for human rights and freedom.

The uprising was a turning point in human history, greatly impacting the establishment of universal human rights, for which we are all indebted. The courage of these men and women has created obligations for us. The success of this rebellion, led by the slaves themselves, is a deep source of inspiration today for the fight against all forms of servitude, racism, prejudice, racial discrimination and social injustice.

UNESCO is marking International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition to pay tribute to all those who fought for freedom, and, in their name, to continue teaching about their story and the values therein. It would be a mistake and a crime to cover it up and forget.

Aside from looking at the past, spotlighting slavery aims to raise an alarm about all forms of contemporary racism, discrimination and intolerance. It brings about a greater awareness of the need to respect human beings, promote a culture of peace and prevent new forms of slavery. Through its project [The Slave Route](#), UNESCO intends to find in this collective memory the strength to build a better world and to show the historical and moral connections that unite different peoples.

Click for more information:

[UNESCO: Slave Trade](#)

[Decade of People-African-descent](#)

Our own SSND documents can offer some further reflections on this day:

You Are Sent

“We are called and sent to deepen communion with God and among people wherever we are - in every place, in every time, in every situation. . . . As the desire of Jesus that all be one becomes more fully our own, our striving for unity embraces all humanity and the whole of creation” (9).

“In accord with church teaching and directives, we work actively, especially in our local situations, to eliminate the root causes of injustice in order to realize a world of peace, justice, and love” (17).

Love Gives Everything

“We expand our understanding of interculturality and commit to develop skills for intercultural living in community and society.”

“The Triune God impels us into the heart of the world to be women of peace, hope, and love.”

