

UN Marks 2004 as anti-slavery year

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Marking 2004 as anti-slavery year, UNESCO urges renewed fight against racism

As the United Nations gears up to mark 2004 as the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition, the head of the world body's cultural agency today called for a universal recommitment to combat all contemporary forms of the scourge.

"Aside from looking at the past, the intention is to sound the alarm about all forms of contemporary racism, discrimination and intolerance, and thus to set the stage for a greater awareness of the need to respect human beings," the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Koïchiro Matsuura said in a message released in Paris.

The UN General Assembly proclaimed 2004 as the celebratory year to mark the bicentenary of the Haitian Revolution, which led to the establishment of the first black republic in the Western hemisphere, and, by extension, to the liberation of the peoples of the Caribbean and Latin America from slavery.

Mr. Matsuura cautioned that the commemoration must foster a more meaningful dialogue among cultures and civilizations. "By retracing the cultural interactions brought about by the slave trade, which transported so many African men and women far from the land of their birth, we can indeed celebrate the extraordinary meeting of cultures born of this enforced dialogue."

Knowing and recognizing the major imprint of African cultures on the world's cultures and civilizations will be the second objective of the commemoration, he added.

The UNESCO chief called universal awareness of the tragedy "essential," and urged that school textbooks throughout the world cover the issue of slavery.

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