UNITED NATIONS, NY, MARCH 25, 2010: - Calling it a scar "400 years deep," and "a festering sore on the conscience of humanity, Ambassador Camillo Gonsalves emotionally honoured the victims of the transatlantic slave trade on the International Day Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Ambassador Gonsalves, speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) at a special commemorative meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, quoted Bob Marley's song "Slave Driver" and called the transatlantic slave trade "a brutalisation of the psyche of a people so violent and enduring that it has created a shared cultural memory of the trauma."

The "collective memory . . . lives so vividly in the souls of those who have died that it is bequeathed to those of us who live today and to those yet unborn," said the Ambassador.

Gonsalves also paid special tribute to Haiti, which he called "the first nation to break the shackles of subjugation, and the enduring seat of our Caribbean strength and pride."

"As our Haitian brothers and sisters confront the catastrophe of recent earthquakes, we have no doubt that, with the help of the international community, they will triumph, as they have triumphed over all prior adversities," he said.

The Ambassador also recognised "the memory of the indigenous peoples of our region - the Arawak, the Kalinago and the Garifuna inhabitants - whose tales of extermination through disease and genocide are also entwined with our own redemption song."

The Vincentian envoy also called on countries to make contributions to the trust fund that has been established for the purpose of erecting a permanent memorial to the victims of slavery

and the transatlantic slave trade on the grounds of the United Nations. This CARICOM-led initiative is of "central importance" to the region, he said.

"This day also stands as a rebuke to those who profited, those who ignored, and those who justified the horrors of slavery and the slave trade," said Ambassador Gonsalves. "Today, we honour, we remember, and we shall never forget."

The March 25th International Day of Remembrance was part of a week of commemorative activities held at the United Nations. Ambassador Gonsalves, again speaking on behalf of CARICOM, also addressed a press conference, the opening of an art exhibit and an Afro-Caribbean music and food fair, all of which were staged under the theme of "Expressing our Freedom through Culture." The week of activities also included a film screening, a briefing for Non-Governmental Organisations, and a videoconference with over 500 students from Ghana, Gambia, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Cuba, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.