



Indian Diaspora Council

Indian Diaspora Council International

Shared heritage, aspirations and interests

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Press Release

Emancipation Day 2017 – Commemoration of 1834 Abolition of Slavery in British Colonies

The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC) and its global affiliates join with former British colonies in commemorating Emancipation Day 2017 in observance of the 183rd anniversary of British abolition of slavery.

The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 ended slavery in the British Empire on August 28, 1834. The end of slavery in 1834 brought freedom from abhorrent, dehumanizing, demeaning and despicable physical brutality, domination and oppressive exploitation of human beings for profit.

Also known as Freedom Day in many countries, Emancipation Day is widely observed in many former British colonies of the British Empire, including the Caribbean, South and East Africa during the first week of August in observance of the emancipation of slaves of African descent. It is also observed in other areas in regard to the abolition of serfdom and other forms of servitude.

Emancipation was also the beginning of indentureship of Indian laborers to the former British colonies lasting from 1834 through 1920. The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC) recognizes the historic significance of Emancipation Day and the official end of organized inhuman treatment of people while cognizant that many of the same practices which were meted on Indian indentured laborers.

Ashook Ramsaran, President of Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC): “Emancipation Day marked the official end of the inhumanity of slavery and brutality of people for profit, a horrible experience etched in history for all posterity not to be repeated. That sad experience is a numbing reminder of the suffering, determination, persistence and endurance under extremely brutal and inhuman conditions. While we celebrate, we also reflect on the triumph of the human spirit and the invaluable contributions of all migration and indigenous peoples to the diverse culture and development of the various countries. Among people of former British colonies, the saga of shared history and shared experience have fostered a unique kindred spirit of resolve, togetherness and kinship – a triumph over obstacles and difficulties with dreams and aspirations of a shared destiny intertwined by history and fate. The descendants of slaves, while saddened by the inhuman experience of their forebears, will always take pride in their unique accomplishment, recognizing and appreciating the enormous sacrifices and achievements for a better future.”

Shri Dnyaneshwar Mulay, Secretary, Overseas Indian Affairs (OIA), Government of India Ministry of External Affairs (MEA): “This inhuman and abhorrent practice has been prevalent from time immemorial in many parts of the world. There was absolute denial of basic human rights to these slaves who were forced to work in inhuman conditions. It was a major development when slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1834 and in USA in 1863.

While the slavery ended, exploitation continued including of the indentured labourers sent from India elsewhere to distant countries. In modern times, illegal trafficking of people is another form of slavery. Concerted efforts are needed to rid this blot on humanity off, those involved in it dealt with firmly and every effort should be made to make the world free of any form of human exploitation. I compliment the Indian Diaspora Council for observing the Slavery Emancipation Day and hope that the event is able to convey the message of Emancipation Day.”

Dr. Satish Rai, Director of Indian Diaspora Council International, Australia (IDCA): The recruitment, enslavement and transportation of millions of unsuspecting African men and women to the Americas have been close to my heart and creativity since 1990s. In my novel *Silent Cries* (1995-Amazon Kindle) and play by the same name, I have written about brutal capture and transportation of Africans to Americas, where the European colonisers had already obliterated millions of the original landowners. The Africans were then auctioned as animals and dehumanised on the now European owned farms. I also discuss the abolition of Slavery and escape of some of the free Africans to Guyana, where they met the indentured Indian labourers and worked alongside them.

As we observe the African Emancipation Day my plea is that we not only pay our utmost respect to the millions of the Africans who were enslaved and dehumanised between 1525 and 1866, we should also remember the millions of the Native Americans who were killed and had their land taken away from them; as well as the 1.2 million Indians who were transported to the colonies to provide cheap labour. These three interrelated events from 1492 to 1917, when the recruitment Indian under indenture system was legally ended. They are part of the same brutal and dehumanising story of colonialism and imperialism which should bind us all. We had a common history; let us have a common destiny!”

Cliff Rajkumar, Director of Indian Diaspora Council International, Canada (IDC): “The abolition of slavery act of 1833 resulting in the final freedom of the African slaves in the British Empire was indeed a glorious and momentous historic occasion. However, it give birth to another form of slavery under the cloak of Indentured-ship which subjected millions of Indians, under British rule, to the harsh yoke of their colonial master's unbridled greed and cruelty in order to maximize their wealth in the sugar plantations they exploited. Indeed, at the core of every person's heart lies the innate need to be unbound and free and to be able to pursue their dreams and give expression to their natural talents, skills, creativity and ambitions. Slavery robs people of their pride and dignity and imprison them in a system designed to inflict punishment and fear without any recourse or just representation. We must stand guard not to let the yoke of slavery repeat itself...ever.

The Indian Diaspora Council and its members acknowledge that oppression of any kind is the most abhorrent and despicable act that human beings can be subjected to. As such, we now join hands with all freedom loving people of the world to recognize and celebrate emancipation day, 2017 in homage to our brave and courageous forebears and also all those who have endured the brutality of servitude. We honour their resilience and unwavering faith in their beliefs and traditions which enabled them to triumphantly weathered the storms and sufferings of this barbaric and inhumane system of enslavement.”

Deo Gosine, Director of Indian Diaspora Council International, Trinidad & Tobago (IDC): Slavery of any kind at any time in the history of mankind has been brutal and inhuman. It is the nature of slavery to subjugate another human being under most despicable conditions without rights, decency and regard for basic human needs, especially freedom. The Emancipation of slavery by the British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 was finally a strong message, followed 3 decades later in the United States of America but preceded by the French Abolition of Slavery in 1794. In recent times, Article 4 of the United Nations 1948 “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” declares “slavery contrary to human rights”. While several important advances have been made, slavery still exists today in many forms, including human trafficking, servitude and inhumane conditions of workers. Humanity would be better served when full recognition of shared existence and inter-dependence, respect and rights are accorded to all of humanity irrespective of race, origin, religion, caste, sex and age.

Dr. Arnold Thomas, Director of Indian Diaspora Council International, St. Vincent (IDC): We honour the brave souls who suffered under the cruel and inhuman system of slavery. We applaud those who fought for the freedom of slaves for their clamouring voices led to the recognition of this abhorrent practice and led to abolition of slavery. The pain and anguish among slaves cannot be easily fathomed by those who have not experienced such brutality. Yet we share the pain universally because it affects all of humanity morally and socially. The descendants of slaves in the British Caribbean region have advanced in all sectors and have made enormous strides in their respective countries while living in peaceful co-existence with the descendants of other groups brought to the region for economic exploitation.

Mridul Pathak, Global Strategy Advisory & Diaspora Development of Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC): There is no excuse or justification for slavery in any form regardless of the economic motives which are purely exploitation of humanity without respect or regard for human dignity and decency. The brutality of slavery must always be condemned and continuing vigilance has become necessary as slavery has taken other forms of economic exploitation. British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 emancipated African slaves in British colonies which led to large numbers of Indians as indentured labourers to fill the resulting labour needs, that in itself another form of repressive and abhorrent practice finally abolished officially in 1917.

Farook Khan, Director of Indian Diaspora Council International, South Africa (IDC): One hundred and eighty three years after slavery is abolished, people are still being sold, traded, held captive and even murdered. True Freedom has evaded us because there is a lack of will by the nations of the world to stamp out this venomous practice which denies our world security. More people now are in bondage than ever before because ruthless governments and organised crime is allowed to spread their tentacles regardless. Spirituality, morality and natural law are being destroyed by greed which has replaced hunger and poverty as the most serious problems we face. Let's use Emancipation as the beginning of an era of meaningful change."

Dr. Deokinand Sharma, President of National Council for Indian Culture, Trinidad & Tobago (NCIC): "The Abolition of slavery is one of the most significant events in the history of mankind. It brought to an end the most brutal treatment and exploitation of millions of Africans over a period of about four hundred years. Today, 178 years after abolition the descendants of these slaves still suffer from the drastic effects of slavery and even the after effects. During slavery they were stripped of all vestiges of their religion and culture, language and traditions and were forced to adopt the culture of their masters. In 1834 when freedom morning came they were thrown into an unknown world without any support to fend for themselves with little or no assistance from any source. Bob Marley in one of his songs urged the Africans to emancipate themselves from mental slavery. To me this means getting away from the past while not ever forgetting history that shaped their lives, educating themselves and their progenies to the fullest extent possible, returning to their culture and traditions as far as may be practical, and instilling pride in themselves. Today we are faced with the slogan "black lives matter". Yes they do matter, for they are part of humanity and it behoves all to treat all of humanity with equality, dignity and respect. They must share equally in the development and growth of the human society. The descendants of the slaves deserve no less."

Mahendra Chaudhry, Leader of Fiji Labour Party and former Prime Minister of Fiji: "As the world commemorates Emancipation Day, we must remind ourselves that although Slavery may well have been officially abolished in 1833/34, it remains a major scourge on society today. Human greed and avarice has through the ages found means of exploiting the weak among us. Slavery gave way to an equally pernicious Indenture System which was officially ended in 1920. But the ILO estimates that 21 million people today exist in some form of slavery. I believe that such inhumane exploitation of the underprivileged in society will continue until governments and civil society organisations find the means of eradicating poverty and empowering the poor."

Dr. Sadananda Sahoo, Asst. Professor at School of Interdisciplinary and Trans-Disciplinary Studies Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India: "Abolition of Slavery is one of the greatest steps taken in human history to bring dignity and freedom to human living. The spirit must continue further to make human life more precious. Humanity must fight more to address higher form of problems that are restricting the human mind to unleash its full potential. The abolition of slavery must remind us that the fight against all forms of man made sufferings must continue and channelise the mind towards higher forms of human living. After the slavery is gone, we have still large scale conflicts and human tragedy today. Human mind must explore better way to co-exist and bring peace and prosperity."

Sir Anand Satyanand, Chairman Commonwealth Foundation and former Governor-General of New Zealand 2006 – 2011: "The world struggles today with combating corruption and religious intolerance. It is noteworthy to look back sometimes on the battles of the past which resulted in the eventual overcome of apartheid, of poliomyelitis and in its time of slavery. Thanks continue to be due to those whose endeavours made the present more tolerable. The role of civil society in addressing all of these changes remains central."

Prof. Mohan Gautam, Indian Diaspora historian and writer: With a divine faith in humanity this day reminds us the freedom of the African slaves by granting the equality with other human beings irrespective of colour, race, class and religions. The Atlantic Slave Trade started in the 15th century by the Portugal and Spain. During the 16th century other countries, Britain, Netherlands, Denmark and France also joined. The Africans from the West African coastal countries were kidnapped, herded, examined and sold openly as a cheap slave labour to the New World. They were to work for sugar, tobacco and cotton products. In Brazil the sugar cane had already started in 1440. Almost 20 million slaves were sold in the New World. Finally in 1838 slave trade and slavery was ended. This Slave trade carried brutalities and inconceivable horror and treated slaves as beasts. Between the period of 1887 and 1807 this movement was expressed by the Quakers, Methodists and others. In 1823 an Anti-Slavery Society was established. Finally, in 1838 slave trade and slavery was ended in the British colonies. Since slaves became free in order to fill the gap of the shortage of labour a new device was thought to import emigrants from India. When Indian emigration started in Mauritius (1834) and British Guiana (1838), of course, slavery was abolished on paper but the new emigrant slavery in form of indenture labour continued. That came to an end (1917) when it was found out that emigration actually has been working as a new system of slavery.”

Prof. Clem Secharan, Emeritus Professor of History, London Metropolitan University: “On the 183rd anniversary of the abolition of slavery, we extend to people of African descent in the Anglophone Caribbean and its diaspora our warmest wishes for continued success. You have risen triumphantly from that dehumanising experience which your ancestors resisted in numerous ways, refusing to be categorised as property, and which they heroically dismantled. You have inherited and proudly continue to advance that legacy of struggle and self-liberation. As we mark the 100th anniversary of the end of another strand of imperial exploitation - Indian indentureship - we wish to reaffirm our solidarity with you, anticipating greater co-operation for the betterment of our peoples.”

Oscar Ramjeet, Director, Legal Affairs Committee, Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC): “Indentureship replaced slavery when Indians were "imported" most of them under deceptive and enforced indenture to work in the sugar estates under harsh and unconscionable condition similar to the black slaves. This wrongful immoral and dastardly act by European governments constitute Crime against Humanity.

It was not until 1917 the labor bondage ended and now the descendants of the semi slaves through the Indian Diaspora Council (IDC) are united to showcase to the world the plight and severe hardship their forefathers endured and perhaps to advocate for Reparatory Justice. Gradually the IDC is making inroads and was successful in convincing the State of New York to adopt a Resolution in recognition of the 100th Anniversary of the Abolition of Indian Indentureship on July 19, 2017. Steps are being taken for other US states, and Caribbean governments to do likewise.”

The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC) encourages efforts with similar resolve and inspired motivation, individually and collectively, to continuously strive for freedom from poverty, diseases, wars, inhumanity, economic inequalities and social injustices.

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Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC), established in 1997, is an international non-profit organization with global affiliates and membership in 21 countries with the objective to embrace, engage and enhance the shared heritage, aspirations and interests of persons of Indian origin with optimum inclusivity.