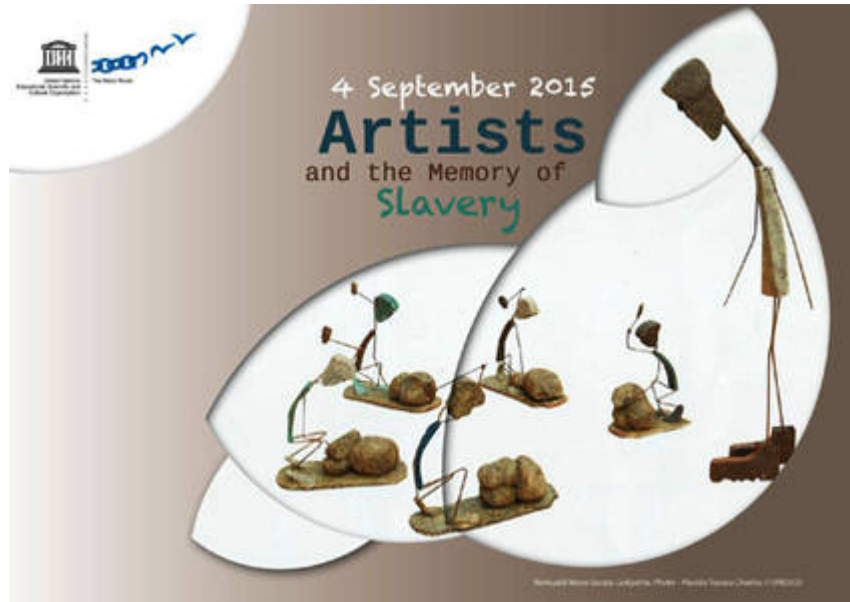


The UNESCO Slave Route Project



The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a specialized agency of the United Nations in association with *Fait a Cuba* and Vallois gallery will host a seminar, and exhibit and a performance on the history and memory of enslavement, September 4-11, 2015 in Paris, France. Hence, UNESCO will celebrate the Slave Route project's 20th anniversary at its Paris headquarters in September.

A live webcast of the 20th anniversary celebration will be available at www.unesco.org. Using the hashtag #slaveroute, audiences may share their thoughts with illustrious speakers, such as H.E. Abdou Diouf, former President of Senegal; H.E. Joachim Chissano, former President of the Republic of Mozambique; Christiane Taubira, French Minister of Justice; Mich  elle Jean, UNESCO Special Envoy for Haiti; and Marcus Miller. Musical traditions, born from the route of enslavement, will also be performed by Tazenco Gwo ka a; Anuanga, Masai dancer; Mary Paz, Cuban eletropercussion; Gnawa music group Sefarat' al khafa ; Brazilian music group Afro Samba Project.



The Slave Route Project, launched in Ouidah, Benin, in 1994, has three objectives, namely to: contribute to a better understanding of the causes, forms of operation, issues and consequences of enslavement in the world (Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, Middle East and Asia); highlight the global transformations and cultural interactions that have resulted from this history; and contribute to a culture of peace by promoting reflection on cultural pluralism, intercultural dialogue and the construction of new identities and citizenships. The project has played a significant role in securing recognition by the United Nations, at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban in 2001, of the slave trade and enslavement (slavery) as crimes against humanity.

Interestingly, Ali Moussa Iye, the chief of the *Slave Route Project* says that “At the proposal of Haiti and of African countries, UNESCO established The Slave Route project. We’re careful to take a holistic and non-accusatory approach, so as to restore dialogue. We must understand this tragedy that divided humanity; keeping this historic fact shrouded in silence is an obstacle to building peace and reconciliation. UNESCO has succeeded in placing the Slave Trade on the international agenda, while developing scientific knowledge about the issue and raising awareness globally. In addition to contributing to the recognition of enslavement as a crime against humanity, we helped proclaim 23 August as the *International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition*. We established National “Slave Route” Committees (Cuba, Haiti, Benin, Portugal, Mexico, Ghana, etc.) and networks of scientific institutions (Latin America, Caribbean, Arab-Muslim World, Indian Ocean, Americas, Europe, etc.).”

By launching the *Slave Route Project* in 1994, UNESCO sought to promote the rapprochement of peoples through the shared heritage of this tragedy. The celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Slave Route Project was thus an opportunity to revisit the road travelled, and the efforts made so as this tragedy becomes a source of inspiration for present and future generations.

In a warm tribute in 2014, UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova has described the *Slave Route Project* to be "one of UNESCO's flagship projects", implying that "if the crime involved many nations, the memory of the crime can now, inversely, bring together nations and show irreversible connections that have been created between peoples." And Federico Mayor, former UNESCO Director-General, stressed the project's importance in a personal message for this celebration: "Let us learn the lessons of humanism that the 'Slave Route' has already given... To forgive but not to forget. To illuminate the present roads. And to vigilantly go down the roads leading to a future with bright horizons for all humans without exception."

Under the motto "Accounts, Markings and Creativity", the 2014 celebration began with a round table entitled "From Slave Route to the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024)". Members of the International Scientific Committee of the project Nelly Schmidt and Sir Hilary Beckles, as well as Mactar Ndoye, Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and H.E. Courtenay Rattray, Chairman of the Permanent Memorial Committee in honour of the victims of enslavement and the transatlantic slave trade in New York, presented the challenges of this history and discussed the role that UNESCO, through this project, can play in the implementation of the Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024).

UNESCO program chief, Ali Moussa Iye, reminded the achievements of the projects, including 200,000 digitized historical documents, the implementation of pedagogical tools for education, the inscription of 44 sites on the World Heritage List linked to this history, and the safeguarding of numerous oral traditions and cultural expression, from four continents, as Intangible Heritage. He suggested areas to explore in the field of culture such as multiple cultural, technical, philosophical and spiritual contributions of people of African descent. He emphasized that UNESCO is equipped to contribute to the implementation of this Decade whose theme is "Recognition, Justice and Development".

Doudou Diene, the former UNESCO project director of Intercultural Roads, urged to reconsider enslavement not only as a thing of the past but also as a challenge for contemporary multicultural societies in a world where dialogue and cultural diversity remain to be achieved. In order to present the rich facets of the history of enslavement, the exhibition 'Africans in India: From Slaves to Generals and Rulers' was inaugurated in the presence of the Ambassador of India, Ms. Ruchira Kamboj, who paid tribute to this harmonious contribution stressing that "it is also a tribute and the strongest testimony to the open-mindedness of the Indian society in which they were an ethnic minority, and whose secular fabric in fact continues to be one of the most powerful characteristics of Indian society where India has proven through its history that diversity does not pull people apart, but rather it brings them closer together."

Reference Source:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/20th-anniversary-of-the-slave-route-project/>

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/the-slave-route/>

Resource:

The Slave Route: 1994-2014 -The Road Travelled (PDF brochure for download)
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002284/228475e.pdf>