

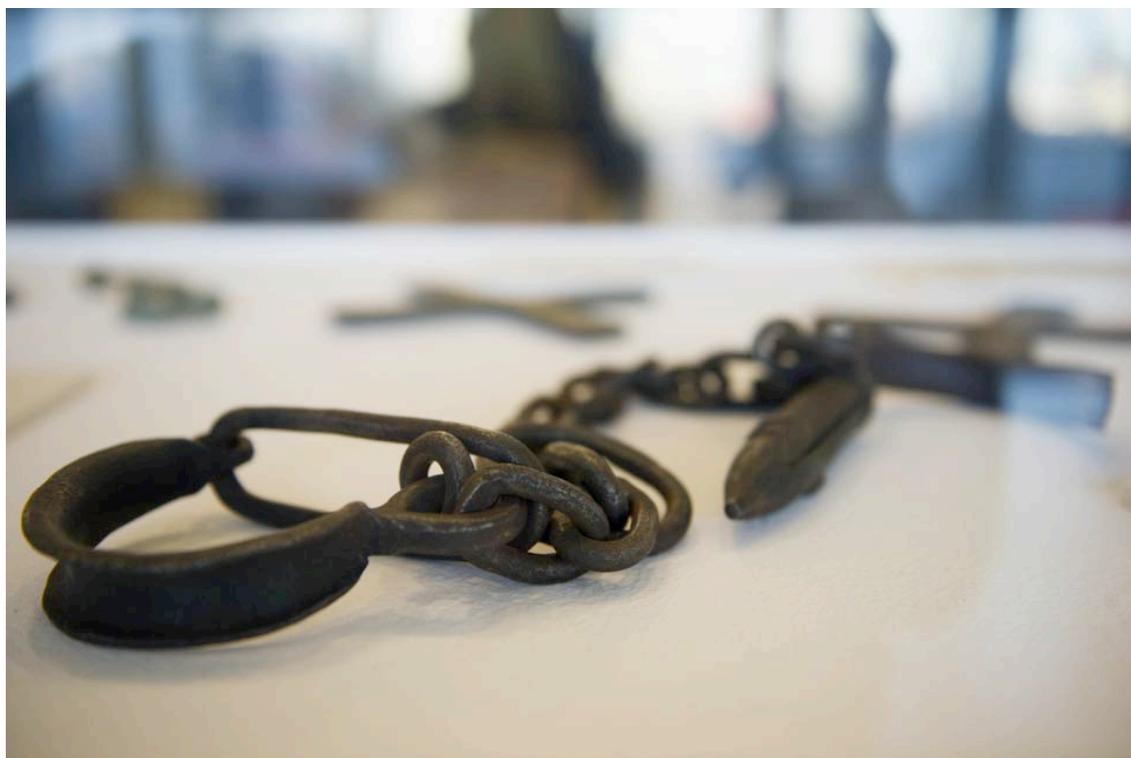


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## **On international day for remembrance, UNESCO chief calls for reflection on slavery**



Shackles used to bind slaves. UN Photo/Mark Garten

23 August 2012 –

Marking the *[International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition](#)*, the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) today called for reflection on the transformation brought about by the slave trade to the world, and urged countries to protect their citizens against racism and forced labour.

“The long series of uprisings by slaves in their quest for freedom are sources for reflection and action for protecting human rights and combating modern forms of servitude,” said UNESCO's

Director-General, Irina Bokova, in a [message](#) to mark the Day, which is observed annually on 23 August.

“The history of the slave trade and its abolition has shaped the world in which we live,” she added. “We are all heirs to this past, which has transformed the world's map, its laws, cultures and social relations, even giving rise to new food habits – especially through the sugar trade.”

The International Day commemorates the uprising which took place on 22-23 August 1791, when slaves in Saint Domingue (present-day Haiti), launched an insurrection which ultimately led to the Haitian revolution and helped to promote the cause of human rights.

“Through their struggles and their desire for dignity and freedom, slaves have contributed to the universality of human rights. People must be taught the names of the heroes of the history of slavery – they are all of humanity's heroes,” Ms. Bokova said.

UNESCO has been playing a leading role in fostering understanding and recognition of the slave trade. Since the establishment of the Slave Route project in 1994, the agency has worked to break the silence on the slave trade and slavery.

The project consists of creating opportunities to promote mutual understanding and international reconciliation and stability through consultation and discussion. It also raises awareness, promotes debate and helps build consensus on approaches to be taken on addressing the issue of the slave trade and slavery.

In her message, Ms. Bokova also stressed that slaves transcended oppression and gave the world a rich cultural heritage.

“Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, the Indian Ocean and Asia now share forms of dance, music, living arts and artistic expression that are a direct legacy of that history,” she said. “Through its cultural and educational programmes, UNESCO seeks to safeguard and promote this heritage as a force for rapprochement and dialogue among peoples.”

This year, the Day will also be part of the preparations for the Decade for People of African Descent, which will begin next year, and seeks to help boost political commitments in favour of people of African descent.

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