
Ambassador Peter Landymore, Permanent Delegate of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to UNESCO, Remarks at the Exclusive Screening of "AMAZING GRACE," February 6, 2008

Bonsoir, good evening, everyone. I am going to say just a very few words, before we get to the enjoyable part of the evening.

Mes excuses - Traduction en francais absent – pas de temps pour donner deux discours - malheureusement, pas de sous-titrage pour mes paroles...

My first words must be of thanks to Mr Philip Anschutz, the producer of this wonderful film, for so generously making it available for this special screening in UNESCO, where we in 2007 have been commemorating the Slave Routes.

Secondly, my thanks to the Director General and his colleagues, especially Mme Riviere, for kindly facilitating its showing here.

This film is about the ending in the British possessions of a trade in human beings that began in the 17th Century and reached its height in the 18th. William Wilberforce and his colleagues were pioneers of what we would now call a Human Rights Campaign.

In the 1770s slavery was declared illegal in England and Scotland – but persisted in the colonies. Another 35 years were needed to abolish the trade; and then another 31 to end the condition of slavery throughout British territories, in 1838.

The 1833 law that achieved this passed in Parliament a few days after Wilberforce's death.

In Britain, we ran a Bicentenary programme last year to commemorate the ending of the trade. This included

- a special commemorative coin;
- full day debates in both houses of parliament;
- an address to both houses by the UNSG, Kofi Annan;
- 180 grass-roots projects, costing \$30m, raising awareness of the trade and its abolition;
- a new museum in one of the main slaving ports, Bristol.

Work continues on a Legacy package: including

- opening of the Liverpool International Slavery Museum;
- a new Slavery Gallery in the London museum;
- addition of Slavery in the British empire as a compulsory component of the school curriculum

among other elements. Finally the Government has confirmed that 23 August – UNESCO's day for the International Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition – will be the focal date for commemorations in the years to come.

Wilberforce and his campaigning colleagues deserve to be remembered: my thanks go to Philip Anschutz and his team who have brought his story to today's generations.

Paris 6 February 2008.
