

'Ark of Return' to honour victims of slavery

The United Nations (UN) yesterday unveiled the winning design for a permanent memorial to victims of the transatlantic slave trade.

Jamaica, in 2007, led the call for the UN to erect a permanent memorial, which UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said would acknowledge the struggles of the millions of Africans who, over more than three centuries, "were violently removed from their homelands, ruthlessly abused and robbed of their dignity". As was the case in 2007, Jamaica took centre stage on Day One of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly. The country's permanent representative to the UN and chair of the Permanent Memorial Committee, Ambassador Courtenay Rattray, was the one who announced the 'Ark of Return', done by Rodney Leon, as the winning design. Dr David Boxer, former curator of the National Gallery of Jamaica, was among the judges who reviewed the entries. TOPPED 310 entries Leon's winning design, which will be built in time for the 69th session of UN General Assembly in 2014, topped a field of an initial 310 designs from 83 countries across five continents. Leon is an American of Haitian descent based in Manhattan. "The Ark of Return' is a symbolic spiritual space and object where one can interact and pass through for acknowledgement, contemplation, meditation, reflection, healing, education and transformation," Leon said. Jamaica's Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller commented of the victims of the trade that "their blood watered the sugar plantations across our region". "The design will undoubtedly serve to inspire the many persons who will visit the memorial and remind us to never allow such crimes against humanity ever again. We must continue to acknowledge the tragedy and consider the legacy, lest we forget," the prime minister said. Ban said the memorial will serve as a reminder of the bravery of those slaves, abolitionists, and unsung heroes who managed to rise up against an oppressive system, fight for their freedom, and end the practice. "Moreover, it is hoped that the memorial will lead to a greater recognition of the contributions that slaves and their descendants have made in their societies," Ban said. Source: The Gleaner