

**ALLIANCE AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS**  
**“An Agenda for Prevention: Non-Discrimination and Empowerment” (11-12 October 2012)**

Keynote Addresses

Speaker: **Kenneth B. Morris, Jr., President, Frederick Douglass Family Foundation**

I am honored to be here with you today. Thank you to the office of the OSCE Special Representative for inviting me to talk about my family history and the work we do at the Frederick Douglass Family Foundation.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Those famous words come from the Declaration of Independence and were written by the honorable, Thomas Jefferson.

Of course, he wrote those very words knowing they didn’t technically apply to the slaves he held in bondage. And, yes, if they were able to read, his slaves may have seen this as more than just a technicality.

87 years after these words were written; Abraham Lincoln helped make them true by issuing and signing the Emancipation Proclamation. In fact, we are currently in the midst of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that one hundred day period between the time Lincoln issued and then signed this important document freeing 4 million slaves in the U.S.

As we probably all know by now, making slavery illegal simply slowed its progress and drove it under ground. Discrimination has long provided the twisted moral justification and cover for industries that drive profit with human fuel. What I’d like to ask today is: How can we get ahead of this immoral and unjust creature and deny it that which it needs to survive? Before I delve deeper into this question, I want to set the stage and tell you a little about my extraordinary family and how I arrived here today.

As I was introduced, I am the great-great-great grandson of the Great Abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, and the great-great grandson of the Great Educator Booker T. Washington. I’ll bet there are some people here today who have never heard these names before. For those of you who have, I’m sure you would agree that they are two of America’s greatest heroes. I am blessed to have the blood of both men running through my veins.

Every time I tell people what my relationship is to these men, not only is it a mouthful trying to spit out all of those greats, but it sometimes makes me feel very far removed. You may be sitting there having a hard time trying to imagine what my connection is to these historic giants. But, I bet many of you may have known a grandparent or even a great grandparent. Well, that’s how close I feel to both men because, you see, my great grandmother Fannie Douglass, to whom I was very close, actually met Frederick Douglass when she was a little girl and my Aunt Portia, to whom I was also very close, was Booker T. Washington’s daughter. I remember being a little boy and sitting on both of their laps as they

would tell me firsthand stories about these great men. When I stop to think that hands that actually touched the great Frederick Douglass and hands that touched the great Booker T. Washington, also touched mine...In a sense, I can say, even with all of those greats, that I stand just one person away from history. We are not that far removed from this history and the slavery with which we're most familiar.

When I meet people for the first time, I'm often asked, so you're related to Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington? Well, what do you do? The other question people want to know is how the two families came together.

It happened on my mother's side: My grandfather, Frederick Douglass III, is Frederick Douglass' great grandson. My grandmother, Nettie Hancock Washington, is Booker T. Washington's granddaughter. My grandparents met at Tuskegee Institute, which is the University Booker T. Washington founded in 1881, in Tuskegee, AL. They were walking across campus and literally bumped into each other. They had no idea the other descended from an historic family. It was love at first sight and they would get married three months later. When my mother, Nettie Washington Douglass, was born, she was the first person to unite the bloodlines. She is an only child, so I have the honor, privilege to be the first male to unite the bloodlines of these historic families.

I've always known I descended from these great men, but I never celebrated or embraced this remarkable heritage. The few times I told people of my relationship, nobody ever believed me and I never felt like it was a point worth arguing. There was also a lot of pressure put on the males in the family to be the next Frederick Douglass, the next Booker T. Washington. For my grandfather, the pressure and weight of expectation would be too much to endure and he would take his own life when my grandmother was three months pregnant with my mom. My mother grew up without a father.

When I was born I had this dual lineage and my family decided not to put any pressure on me at all. They were determined not to force anything on me. For this, I'm grateful because it allowed me to grow without any pressure, but it also caused me to take my ancestry for granted for most of my life until providence called.

A few years ago, a friend handed me a National Geographic magazine and the cover story was called *21<sup>st</sup> Century Slaves*. I looked at that headline and I reacted as I think most people do the first time they hear about the existence of human trafficking and modern day slavery. I thought slavery had ended with the work of Frederick Douglass, the abolitionists and the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. As I started to read the article, I was shocked to find out there are millions of people around the world living as slaves, many living in conditions as horrific as the slavery my ancestors endured.

I have two young daughters who were 12 and 9 at the time I read this article. When I found that there were girls my daughters' ages, and even younger, forced to be sex slaves in the brothels of Southeast Asia, and that slavery still exists in every civilized and uncivilized country around the world and that the victims were mostly women and children...there was no way I could look my girls in their eyes and just walk away and not do anything. Especially, when I had this platform that my ancestors had built through struggle and through sacrifice. It became clear that I could leverage the historical significance of my ancestry to stand up and do something about this unthinkable crime. So my mom and I started the Frederick Douglass Family Foundation to honor our great ancestors and to fight the scourge of human trafficking.

Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington were born slaves. They were born into the most horrific conditions that a human being can be subjected to. Yet, through Power of Education, they were able to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to effect change in the lives of millions of people. Booker T. Washington had an opportunity to go to school because he was freed at 9 years old when the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. Frederick Douglass never spent one day of his life in a classroom. It was illegal to teach a slave to read and write so he was a self-taught scholar. They both realized that there was Power in Knowledge and this would be their key to freedom. I truly believe that education and the power of knowledge is the key to freedom for those who are trapped in slavery today.

Frederick Douglass was born a slave on the eastern shore of Maryland. He taught himself to read and write over the objections of his overseers and, at the age of 20, he escaped the bonds of slavery. He became a leading Abolitionist through the power of his speeches, his newspaper and his books. He was an adviser to Abraham Lincoln helping to shape the concept of freedom in America. And, when he died, my great-great- great grandfather believed that slavery was gone forever. When I die, I'll know that it will never be gone. This is both the bad news and the good news.

The abolition of legalized slavery in every country of the world has been accomplished. But, with slavery once again on the minds of human rights activists, it's time to move on from the idea of modern abolition. We will not end slavery in our lifetime any more than we'll end fraud, robbery or murder. Slavery is a crime; slavery is a crime that robs souls, steals labor and appropriates the dignity of innocents. As leaders in the anti-trafficking movement, the longer we perpetuate the myth of abolition, the longer it will take to address the problem effectively in communities around the world. After all, if we continue to believe that we can end slavery if only we can mobilize enough people or raise enough money or say enough prayers or produce enough Public Service Announcements, we would never have to stop and make a plan. It's only when we admit to ourselves and to those around us - slavery will never end – that we can begin to plan for the present and the future and protect our citizens against this insidious crime. In the microcosm of slavery, every victim exists in a state of emergency. If we are to wrap our arms around the crime as whole, WE must approach it with a measured logic and an immeasurable resolve.

Without a set timeframe to abolish slavery, we can begin building the social infrastructure to permanently reduce the incidence of human trafficking. First there is the intellectual foundation created with funded education, research and training. We can develop international standards for terminology and criteria used for identifying victims as well as protocol for their rescue. We can collaborate on best practice legislation and the best application of law for prosecutors that can be applied locally, nationally and internationally. We can find and apply more support and funding for collaborative local, national and international law enforcement efforts. We can encourage cooperation from local agencies, NGOs, corporations and learning institutions. And we can devise insightful, loving and compassionate services for survivors of human trafficking that will help them become productive members of our communities again. A few moments ago, I asked: How can we get ahead of this immoral and unjust creature and deny it that which it needs to survive?

The first step of that plan, and the one on which my organization does most its work, is education. Picture for a moment a terrible accident on a foggy highway...The normal response of any community, of course, is to send an emergency vehicle to administer aid to the victims. As cars continue to pile up on the foggy highway, however, it becomes clear that simply sending more emergency vehicles to assist the victims of an ever-growing number of accidents will not be enough as the community's resources become stretched. The emergency workers finally come together and decide that they will send

someone ahead of the fog. They station an officer on the highway just before the place where the fog begins. The officer advises drivers to proceed with extreme caution as they enter the fog and they easily avoid danger. This must be the moment that we decide collectively to send someone ahead of the fog. Indeed, it's mostly our children, our immigrants and our poor that are driving headlong into danger. But, one way or another, we all assume the costs.

In my country, I'm not aware of any significant national plan to warn anyone, let alone children, of the dangers of human trafficking. My organization believes that, by stationing itself in schools, we can not only help prevent young people from becoming vulnerable to traffickers, but we can make THEM the officers on the highway who educate their peers and their communities. There is nothing more powerful for a young person than knowing they have the ability to make meaningful change in the world – especially when we start with young people that feel powerless to do anything and especially even in their own lives.

In 2013, we will launch a pilot human trafficking education program with New York City Public Schools. With a focus on the health and wellbeing of students, Mayor Bloomberg's office wants the most vulnerable of New York City's youth to receive this curriculum first. When we talk about at-risk youth in New York City, we're talking about predominantly black and/or Hispanic children from low income, often single parent households. Both boys and girls are at risk of being trafficking for commercial sex as well as for becoming traffickers themselves not to mention one-day potential buyers of commercial sex.

The name of our curriculum is *History, Human Rights and the Power of One*. The title is meant to illustrate the formula we use in everything we do which is to help young people understand the issue of contemporary slavery better by placing it within the context of historical slavery and then asking them to use the power they have, especially with digital technology and social networks, to effect change on the issue. It's our dream to one day realize the full strength of this resource when young people can express themselves collectively as was done during the Arab Spring demonstrations.

Our curriculum takes advantage of a simple and wonderful teaching method called, service-learning. This does exactly what the name suggests; it combines classroom learning with service in the community or wherever students can turn their ideas into action.

We would like to see, as soon as possible, a national human trafficking education program in place that would be facilitated by the US Department of Education. Every secondary student would be encouraged, at one grade level or another, to receive:

- A more in-depth understanding of historical slavery,
- Lessons on the many forms of modern day slavery,
- Instruction on avoiding the dangers of human trafficking and,
- Guidance on how to take action on the issue.

This is a model that could easily be applied internationally by turning the focus on more local forms of slavery and by teaching the histories of national freedom fighters. Frederick Douglass and the Abolitionists are the examples we use to guide young people through the service-learning process. Booker T. Washington and education are the examples we use to help protect, engage and enlighten young people. Washington said, "If you want to lift up yourself, lift up someone else." Our young people are lifting themselves up by working on a global issue that is greater than they are. Douglass said, "It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men?" Our programs are building strong children

and preparing them to be the next generation of great leaders in the mold of my ancestors. Each country has its own heroes and sheroes to hold up and leverage in the same manner.

#### Closing

I've said some things here that I doubt many of you were expecting to hear. Maybe I'll hear you do the same. I hope I've port forth some ideas that will make us think about a different approach so that we can begin to perceive and discuss this problem in a positive way. My words about modern day abolition were not meant to be shocking or funny or symbolic in any way, I was stating the facts as I believe them to be – facts worth stating once more.

Yes, we all know that you cannot abolish something that is already illegal. But, by saying to people that we're "trying to abolition modern day slavery", we are not only making a simple error in grammar or harmless hyperbole, we're placing objects in the road to comprehending and acting upon this urgent problem.

It may sound counter intuitive to why you came to hear me speak, but I would like to finish by having everyone in this room repeat something after me: "We will NOT abolition slavery!" "We will NOT abolition slavery!"

Thank you for listening.