

# Understanding the Commemoration of 400 Years after Slavery on Africa's Socioeconomic Development

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## Abstract

The commemoration of 400 years since the onset of slavery in North America serves as a critical juncture for reflection, acknowledgement, and action regarding the historical injustices faced by African peoples. This paper explores the profound implications of this milestone for Africa, emphasising its significance in various aspects of societal, economic, cultural, and educational development. By recognising the suffering inflicted by colonial powers, the commemoration prompts a deeper understanding of the systemic racism and inequalities that persist today. It highlights the African diaspora's rich cultural contributions, advocating for preserving and celebrating this heritage as vital to fostering unity and collective identity. Moreover, the commemoration catalyses significant opportunities for African countries to develop their socioeconomic programs by absorbing the African Diaspora and building proper tourism tracks for such categories of tourists. This is specifically important now with the rise of the African American Middle class in Europe. The 400-year commemoration could bring critical discussions on reparations, educational equity, and policies aimed at addressing historical grievances. By facilitating open dialogues around reconciliation and healing, this commemoration encourages the building of relationships across African cultural and racial divides worldwide. The paper further asserts that the lessons drawn from this historical context can inspire contemporary justice movements globally, notably in solidarity with struggles such as the Free Palestine movement. Ultimately, the 400-year commemoration unfolds avenues for international cooperation, cultural exchange, and sustainable development, reinforcing the imperative to confront the past while paving the way for a more equitable future for African communities and their Diasporas worldwide.

**Keywords:** *400 Years after Slavery Commemoration, Slavery, African American, Historical Injustice, Systemic Racism, Cultural Heritage, Social Justice. African Development, Identity and Heritage, African Tourism.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 400th anniversary of the transatlantic slave trade represents a pivotal opportunity for reflection and growth, particularly for Africa. This solemn occasion not only reminds us of the painful history of slavery and its enduring impact but also opens the door to a multitude of possibilities aimed at revitalising African societies across various domains—economically, culturally, and socially. The African American perspective on this commemoration highlights the interconnectedness of histories and emphasises the implications for African development. Simon (2019)

One of the most critical aspects of this commemoration is the acknowledgement of the suffering inflicted upon African nations and their people through centuries of slavery and colonial exploitation, Hartman (2012). This recognition prompts a collective understanding of the historical roots of current systemic inequities, thus facilitating conversations about present-

day challenges related to race, inequality, and social justice. The lessons drawn from this history are invaluable as Africa seeks to address its contemporary issues and forge a path toward a more equitable future.

Moreover, the anniversary is a powerful platform to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the African diaspora. This commemoration reinforces the significance of storytelling and education by honouring the artistic, literary, and spiritual contributions of those descended from enslaved individuals. Such recognition plays a crucial role in preserving the legacy of resilience and creativity that defines African culture, fostering pride and unity among current and future generations.

Additionally, the 400-year milestone presents a critical juncture for advocating meaningful policy changes that address the systemic inequalities rooted in the history of slavery. Discussions on reparations, educational equity, and social reform can gain momentum from this historical reflection, reinforcing efforts toward civil rights and social justice within Africa and globally. The act of remembrance becomes a catalyst for reform movements, inspiring continued activism in the struggle for equality and representation. Simon (2019)

Furthermore, the commemoration invites vital dialogues about reconciliation and healing. Open discussions surrounding the legacies of slavery encourage societies to confront the harsh truths of their pasts, allowing for healing at both community and individual levels, Hartman. (2012). This process is essential for building bridges across cultural divides and fostering understanding among diverse societies, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious future.

From an educational standpoint, the commemoration can reshape curricula worldwide to ensure accurate representations of historical narratives, including the impacts of slavery and the profound contributions of African and African American individuals. It encourages future generations to engage with and learn from the past, fostering awareness of the long-lasting effects of colonialism and enslavement on global systems. Hartman (2012).

Moreover, the significance of understanding the history of slavery—a historical phenomenon linked to issues like apartheid and colonialism—extends beyond academic interest. It has the potential to raise awareness around contemporary struggles for justice, such as the Free Palestine movement, encouraging a global perspective on oppression and the shared goals of liberation and understanding. Buheji and Hasan (2024)

In essence, commemorating 400 years since the onset of slavery not only honours those who endured unimaginable suffering but also illuminates the path forward for Africa and its diaspora. It presents an opportunity for solidarity, healing, and development, building a foundation for a brighter future rooted in justice and mutual respect. Simon (2019)

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Importance of 400 Years after Slavery commemoration to Africa.**

The African American reflection on 400 years after slavery brings many opportunities to Africa since it profoundly impacts various aspects of African society, economics, culture, and tourism. Several key areas highlight the importance of this commemoration to Africa. Adu-Ampong and Dillette (2024).

One of the paramount importance of this commemoration is the recognition of the suffering caused by the European and American colonialists to Africa and humanity in general.

Recognising the 400 years since the onset of slavery allows for the acknowledgement of the immense suffering endured by enslaved individuals and their descendants. It sheds light on the historical foundations of systemic racism and socioeconomic disparities that persist today, allowing for a deeper understanding of contemporary issues related to race and inequality. Simon (2019)

Celebrating this anniversary also encourages preserving and appreciating the African diaspora's rich cultural heritage and contributions, including art, music, literature, and traditions. This promotes the importance of storytelling and education in keeping the history and experiences of enslaved people alive and ensuring that future generations understand their legacy.

The 400-year commemoration marks a crucial time to advocate for policies and initiatives aimed at addressing the systemic inequalities rooted in slavery. This includes discussions about reparations, educational equity, and criminal justice reform. Such memories also can catalyse movements advocating for civil rights and social justice, encouraging continued activism in pursuit of equality and representation worldwide.

The 400-year commemoration provides a platform for open discussions about race, historical injustices, and the need for reconciliation. This acknowledgement is vital for healing both individuals and communities affected by the legacy of slavery. Such programs also encourage building relationships across racial and cultural divides, fostering understanding and collaboration towards a more equitable society.

From an educational perspective, it can influence educational curricula worldwide to ensure that history is accurately taught, including the impacts of slavery and the contributions of African Americans throughout history. This would help promote awareness of the ongoing impacts of slavery and colonialism in shaping global histories and current events.

This paper encourages international solidarity movements that address similar issues in different contexts, fostering a global fight against racism and oppression. The commemoration would contextualise slavery and its related systems, including issues such as apartheid and colonialism. It would raise future generations' sensitivity towards Free Palestine and Gaza issues. This would allow the world to examine slavery within a global context, recognising its impact beyond colonial countries and optimising its socioeconomic implications on global systems of power and economy. Buheji and Hasan (2024).

## **2.2 Realising the History of Slavery and Racism in America**

Enslaved Africans had been part of Portuguese, Spanish, French and British history since the 16th century. In a note by John Rolfe written in a letter in 1619, "20 and odd negroes" described a Dutch ship to the nascent British colonies, arriving at what is now Fort Hampton in Virginia. These captives who landed in Virginia were probably the first slaves to arrive in what would become the United States 150 years later. Shah and Adolphe, (2019) mentioned how thinkers like Toni Morrison see the USA as a country where Americans mean white and everybody else has to hyphenate.

History shows that after the first captives were forced on Virginia's shores in 1619, the majority of the country started to use African slaves, besides the Native American slaves and white European indentured servants. It was not until the end of the 17th century that the transatlantic slave trade impacted the American colonies. By 1661, the first anti-miscegenation

statute – prohibiting marriage between races – was enacted in Maryland. Until the 1960s, 21 US states, most in the South, still had these laws in place.



**Figure 1: An Advertisement for 250 ‘fine healthy negroes’ who recently arrived from Africa on the slave ship appeared in Boston in 1700**

Source: Shah and Adolphe (2019), the Guardian, after MPI/Getty Images

The Declaration of Independence in 1776 brought a statement that “all men are created equal, that their creator endows them with certain unalienable rights,” It didn’t create a major impact on slavery for African Americans, despite it becoming a reference for the abandonment of slavery many years later.

Thomas Jefferson, a slaveowner himself, removed the reference after receiving criticism from several delegates who enslaved black people. This shows the fabric of the American political society at that time.

Slavery was thought to be necessary for maintaining the broad tobacco fields of Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina, where African Americans constituted more than 50% of the population by 1776. Slavery then spread to the rice plantations further south.

The British continued to operate the slave trade across the Atlantic, and it became one of their most prominent businesses of the 18th century. Approximately 600,000 of 10 million African slaves made their way into the American colonies before the slave trade – not slavery – was banned by Congress in 1808. By 1860, though, the US recorded nearly 4 million enslaved black people – 13% of the population – in the country as the American-born population grew.

Shah and Adolphe (2019) mentioned in Guardian that eight of the first 12 US presidents were slave owners. Proponents of slavery sent tens of thousands of free black people to Liberia in the 19th century to prevent disruption caused by free descendants of slaves.

In 1865, Abraham Lincoln said that the Civil War was fought to keep America whole but did not call for the abolition of slavery – at least initially. Southern states said they wanted to secede to protect states’ rights, but they were fighting to keep people enslaved. Shah and Adolphe (2019), the Guardian.

By 1868, white supremacist ideologies started to spread in the USA, which led to legal rationalisations that led to further violence and racial terror in the community. Different states passed “codes” to prevent black people from being truly free. Eventually, with their emphasis on the 14th Amendment, African American men were granted the right to vote and were extended birthright citizenship.

In 1898, the recession of the late 19th century hit the US. Knight riders went out in the dark, burning the homes of African Americans who bought their land. By 1926, as African Americans were shut out of jobs and opportunities during Jim Crow, and as more jobs became available in the north and Midwest, more than 2 million southern African Americans migrated after the First World War. Shah and Adolphe (2019), the Guardian.



**Figure 2: Illustrates the Segregation of Drinking Water by Color in a bus terminal in Oklahoma City in July 1939**

Source: The Guardian (2019) after Russell Lee for the Farm Security Administration/Universal via Getty Images

In 1954, in the *Brown v Board of Education* ruling, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was unconstitutional and schools would have to integrate. The civil rights leaders led anti-segregation marches across the country in the 1960s. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 helped stop the racial discrimination in voting.

The Guardian (2019) brought a Pew study that showed till 2017 the median wealth of white households was \$171,000 – 10 times that of black households (\$17,100). Meanwhile, voter suppression, and the aggressive attempts to limit the vote for poorer communities of color has become more pronounced since the gutting of the Voting Rights Act in 2013.

### **2.3 Learning for Africa about How Colonial Power Works**

Piercy (2019) explained how the beginning of a 400-year story is filled with tragedy, inequality, resilience, and survival. Back in a time when colonial powers were carefully developing systems of slavery to make new commodities like sugar and tobacco profitable, enslaved people were at the center and not the margins of the story.

Over time, English colonists and later Americans would build and maintain a legal and social system of their own that enslaved people of African descent for life, ensured that their children would be enslaved, and made incredible profits off of their labour.

European powers invented racialised chattel slavery, i.e. slavery based on race that made people (and not their labour) property. This took time to develop and was different in contexts controlled by different world powers. Planters needed more slave labour to make cotton plantations profitable in the Deep South. Lexington, for example, was home to one of the most important slave markets in the country that daily sold enslaved people to states in the Deep South.

Acknowledging colonial and related slavery history is an important step towards facing Africa's present and future challenges. It helps to overcome and reconcile this painful, ongoing history and make the continent move on.

#### **2.4 Role of Tourism in Optimising the None-Financial Wealth of Africa**

Buheji et al. (2023) see that Africa is full of non-financial wealth. Tour plays a significant role in optimising Africa's non-financial wealth, including cultural heritage, natural resources, and community wellbeing. Tourism encourages the preservation of Africa's traditional customs, languages, and crafts. By showcasing local cultures to visitors, communities are motivated to maintain their heritage, which can instil pride and identity among locals. Adu-Ampong and Dillette (2024).

Ecotourism and responsible tourism practices promote the preservation of natural landscapes and wildlife. This focus on sustainability can lead to increased awareness and action regarding Africa's environmental issues, benefiting biodiversity and ecosystem health. Besides, Tourism can foster further African community engagement and development by involving local populations in tourism activities. This involvement can lead to improved infrastructure, healthcare, and education, enhancing overall living standards.

While primarily a financial aspect, the jobs created by the tourism industry also contribute to social wellbeing. Employment opportunities in hospitality, guiding, and cultural experiences strengthen community ties and reduce poverty. By encouraging the sale of local crafts, food, and services, tourism helps boost local economies. This can lead to a greater appreciation for local traditions and practices, which contributes to Africa's cultural preservation.

Tourism can serve as a platform for raising global awareness about Africa's diverse cultures and pressing issues such as conservation, community needs, and partnerships for sustainable development. With the consistent progress of demand for tourism facilities and services often leads to improvements in local infrastructure (roads, utilities, and communication), which benefits residents beyond tourism.

#### **2.5 What types of Services Expected by the African American Tourists in relevance of the commemoration of 400 Years after Slavery?**

American commemorating the 400 years since the beginning of slavery often seek services that provide a respectful, educational, and transformative experience. They expect guided tours focused on the history and impact of slavery, which include visits to significant historical sites, museums, and memorials. Experienced guides play a vital role by offering context and personal narratives that resonate deeply with visitors. Forsdick (2014).

In addition to tours, events such as lectures, panel discussions, performances, and storytelling are essential for highlighting African American culture, resilience, and contributions throughout history. Formal ceremonies dedicated to honouring ancestors—featuring moments of reflection, prayer, and community engagement—foster a sense of connection and healing among participants.

Hands-on workshops that explore African American history, culture, and art enable tourists to engage with their heritage actively. Ensuring accessibility for all visitors, including those with disabilities, is crucial in creating an inclusive environment that honours the diversity within the African American community. Emotional support services, such as counselling or discussion groups, can provide spaces for visitors to process their experiences and feelings regarding the historical context of their visits.

Access to libraries or resource centres filled with books, documents, and artefacts related to African American history and the legacy of slavery enriches the experience, while knowledgeable staff are available to assist with inquiries. Tourists also appreciate the ability to customise their visits based on personal interests, exploring themes like family heritage, civil rights, and cultural influence.

Furthermore, opportunities to meet and interact with local African American communities allow for deeper understanding and connections to contemporary issues and achievements. Finally, souvenirs that reflect the significance of the commemorative events enable visitors to take home a piece of history and culture. At the same time, efficient transportation options ensure easy access to various commemorative sites.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study deploys several methods in reviewing and gathering data about the socioeconomic needs of the African community and what the current African Americans specifically are looking for when they plan to visit Africa in relation to the 400 Years from Slavery commemoration. Also, it studies how to use that information to bring new tourism programs suitable. The outcome of this exercise could help use this commemoration to benefit Africa's socioeconomic development.

The secondary data and the researcher's observations collected from visiting the most important African countries that are already commemorating 400 years show that much work still needs to be done to attract African Americans to the content in general.

## **4.0 APPLICATION & ANALYSIS OF LINKING 400 YEARS TO AFRICA REVIVAL AND TOURISM**

### **4.1 Commemoration of 400 Years from Slavery vs. the Issue of Racism**

American slavery endured for more than 400 years due to a combination of historical, social, economic, and cultural factors. Understanding these enduring impacts helps frame the conversation around tourism and the revival of Africa. Here are the key reasons for the persistence of slavery's legacy, along with the potential links to tourism and the revival of African heritage and culture. Buheji and Ahmed (2024)

The legacy of slavery is embedded in American history, contributing to ongoing debates about race, identity, and justice. Awareness and remembrance of this history play roles in contemporary social movements. The 400 years of commemoration challenge the structures of

systemic racism established during slavery have persisted, influencing contemporary social, economic, and political systems. Discriminatory practices in housing, education, and employment continue to perpetuate inequality.

The cultural heritage of African Americans has roots in the slave experience, with deeply ingrained traditions, languages, and art forms. This cultural identity shapes the African American experience and perceptions of race in the United States. Along this, the historical injustices linked to slavery have resulted in significant wealth disparities between Black and white Americans. Economic disadvantages faced by descendants of enslaved people continue to manifest in areas like education, housing, and healthcare.

#### **4.2 Linking Africa's Tourism Program with Commemoration of 400 Years from Slavery**

Tourism can highlight African American history, including slavery's impact, through heritage sites, museums, and cultural festivals. Visiting locations significant to the African American experience helps educate the public and promote understanding about the experience of slavery. Forsdick (2014).

Certain African initiatives can be implemented to connect African Americans with their ancestral roots in Africa. Tours to West Africa, where many enslaved people originated, can promote cultural exchange, restoring pride in heritage while fostering unity across the diaspora. Tourism can drive economic development in Africa by creating job opportunities and encouraging investment in local communities. By revitalising tourism focusing on cultural heritage and historical sites, African nations can benefit economically while promoting their rich histories.

While tourism can help preserve and promote African heritage, it can also serve as an opportunity to revitalise aspects of culture that may have been diminished due to colonialism and slavery. This can include reviving traditional practices, languages, and art forms. This is an excellent opportunity for Africa to develop educational tourism programs that emphasise the history of slavery, the resilience of African cultures, and the enduring impact of colonisation, which can enhance understanding and foster a collective sense of identity and healing. Engaging local African youth communities in tourism initiatives can ensure that tourism's benefits directly support descendants of those affected by slavery, empowering communities through shared ownership and storytelling.

#### **4.3 The Expected Socioeconomic Impact Commemoration of 400 Years of Slavery on Africa**

The positive socioeconomic impact of the African American community investing in Africa can significantly benefit both the communities involved and the broader African nations. The investment from the African American community could lead to the establishment of businesses and enterprises that create job opportunities for local populations, reducing unemployment rates.

By starting businesses, African Americans can encourage a spirit of entrepreneurship in the African communities, leading to innovations that address local needs and promote economic independence. The direct financial investments in various sectors (agriculture, technology, real estate) can stimulate economic growth and development, attracting further investments from other diaspora communities and international investors.

African American investors often bring valuable skills, education, and experience that can contribute to capacity building within African nations. This knowledge sharing can



enhance local expertise across various industries. Collaborations between African American professionals and local communities can lead to vocational training programs, improving skill sets within the workforce and increasing employability.

Projects initiated by returning investors can lead to improved infrastructure, such as transportation, energy, and technology, which are crucial for economic development and efficiency. Such investments may encompass sectors like healthcare and education, leading to improved services and ultimately enhancing the quality of life for local communities.

Increased investment and engagement between African Americans and African communities can foster a sense of cultural exchange, strengthen ties across the diaspora, and promote social cohesion. Investments directed toward community-building efforts can improve local amenities, promote cultural heritage, and strengthen communal ties.

African American investments can pave the way for trade relationships between the U.S. and African nations, enhancing export opportunities and integrating African economies into the global market. The increased visibility and engagement from the African American community can stimulate tourism, drawing visitors interested in cultural heritage and business opportunities, further contributing to local economies.

Investment in Africa often comes with philanthropic efforts, such as funding educational scholarships, healthcare initiatives, and infrastructure projects directly impacting disadvantaged communities. Through social responsibility projects, returning investors can help address pressing social issues, from health disparities to educational inequities, fostering community resilience. Investment can promote good governance by encouraging transparent business practices, advocating for human rights, and supporting civil society initiatives. Increased engagement can strengthen institutions by enhancing accountability and promoting sustainable practices within governments and organisations.

Preserving and promoting cultural heritage to African Americans can strengthen national identities and contribute to economic tourism. Engagement with the African diaspora could foster investment, knowledge transfer, and cultural exchange, leading to enhanced development. Implementing programs that address historical grievances can help rebuild and strengthen African communities. This commemoration can help address issues like climate change and public health, which can be built in collaboration with Western nations.

Different African countries, such as Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa, have gained some outcomes from this 400-year commemoration. More African nations may benefit from initiatives targeting their diaspora, promoting tourism focused on historical sites, and enhancing their cultural identities. Each country has unique resources and historical contexts that could be leveraged for growth and development. Buheji and Ahmed (2024)

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Importance of the Rising Middle-Class of African American/African European Experience for African Development

The African American middle class in the United States and the rest of the Western Countries has been a notable trend in recent decades. However, exact numbers can vary based on definitions and metrics used.

The African American middle class has expanded significantly since the Civil Rights Movement, with improved education, better job opportunities, and increased household

incomes. Recent reports show that many African American households are considered part of the middle class. Data from sources like the Pew Research Center can provide more specific numbers, generally indicating that about 40-50% of African American households might be classified as middle class. However, this can be subject to change with new census data and economic conditions. Kochhar and Sechopoulos (2022).

The increased college enrolment and graduation rates among African Americans and those residing in Europe contribute significantly to this growth, as higher education often correlates with better job prospects and earnings. However, despite growth, the African American middle class still faces challenges such as wealth disparities, fewer assets compared to other groups, and vulnerability to economic downturns.

The middle class of African Americans and African Europeans holds significant potential for the development of Africa. These new, native middle classes often have the financial capacity to invest in businesses in Africa. This includes starting new ventures, investing in local businesses, and participating in joint ventures, all of which can contribute to economic growth and job creation on the continent. Today, many African Americans and Europeans are highly educated and skilled. Engaging with Africa through exchange programs, partnerships, or direct relocation can help transfer valuable skills and knowledge to local communities.

The middle class often has more significant disposable income, which can increase the flow of remittances to Africa. This financial support is vital for families and communities, helping to improve living standards and invest in education and health. The diverse cultural experiences and innovative perspectives of African Americans and African Europeans can lead to developing new ideas and creative industries in Africa, fostering cultural exchange and boosting sectors like media, technology, and arts.

As a growing socio-economic group, the African middle class, whether Americans or Europeans, can influence policies that affect Africa through advocacy, philanthropy, and diplomatic channels. They can be crucial in shaping international policies and perceptions about Africa.

## **5.2 What type of Hope the 400 years from Slavery commemoration Give to Gaza and the Free-Palestine Movement?**

The commemoration of 400 years since the beginning of slavery in what is now the United States serves as a poignant reminder of the struggles against oppression and the ongoing pursuit of justice and equality. While the contexts of African American history, the situation in Gaza, and the broader Free-Palestine movement are distinct, there are several ways in which the commemoration might inspire hope or offer insights.

The African American journey from slavery to emancipation and ongoing civil rights struggles demonstrates the resilience and strength of a community facing systemic oppression. This can inspire those in Gaza and supporters of the Palestinian cause to remain steadfast in pursuing freedom and justice.

The global recognition of historical injustices, such as slavery, highlights the importance of international solidarity in addressing human rights issues. This can encourage greater global engagement and support for the Palestinian cause, emphasising the need for collective action against all forms of oppression. The commemoration helps raise awareness about historical wrongdoings, emphasising the need for historical recognition and acknowledgement as a step towards healing and reconciliation. This can parallel the calls for acknowledgement of

Palestinian struggles and rights. Observances like these open conversations about past injustices and the importance of advocacy for marginalised groups. They encourage dialogues on peace, coexistence, and the pursuit of negotiated solutions to conflicts relevant to African Americans and Palestinians.

Just as the African American community continues to draw strength and identity from its history, Palestinians can find empowerment in their cultural heritage and historical narratives, fostering a sense of unity and purpose. While the situations are contextually different, the underlying themes of resistance, hope, and the fight for justice have universal resonance and can serve as motivational pillars for those advocating for the rights and freedoms of Palestinians, besides inspiring human rights initiatives.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The importance of 400 years after slavery cannot be overstated. It is a critical reflection, justice, healing, and action moment. By acknowledging and addressing the legacy of slavery, society can move towards a future that is more equitable and just for all.

The legacy of American slavery is complex and enduring, deeply embedded in social, cultural, and economic structures. Linking this legacy to tourism and the revival of Africa offers opportunities for healing, education, and cultural reinvigoration. Engaging in respectful and meaningful dialogue, alongside tourism initiatives that honour and promote African heritage, can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable future for all involved.

The return and investment of the African American community in Africa can create a ripple effect of positive socioeconomic change. Strong networks between these native Africans can facilitate international trade, build global partnerships, and connect African markets with larger global economies. Overall, the rising middle class offers a wealth of resources, experiences, and networks that can significantly contribute to the sustainable development of African nations by fostering economic growth, innovation, and social progress.

Such investments can foster economic development, enhance skills, improve infrastructure, and uplift communities, leading to sustainable growth and renewed hope for a prosperous future. Ultimately, this can contribute to a more interconnected and equitable global community.

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