The elegant surfaces of the International African American Museum glow in the late afternoon light. At water’s edge, raised above the sacred ground on which it stands, and enriched by its distinctive gardens, this building emanates excellence and purpose.

Now, with the first of a series of occupancy permits having been issued, the Museum staff can begin to occupy the building, install exhibits, and prepare for the first visitors.

This is, indeed, a landmark moment in a long journey.

Since proposing the Museum in my State of the City Address twenty-two years ago, I have had no higher priority than to see this institution become a reality. Not a day has gone by without my mind turning to its challenges.

Our journey has been long, because it took time to secure the optimal site: a site that is called ‘sacred’ because it is precisely where so many enslaved Africans arrived in our country, and many died here. It took time to raise the resources, assemble the team, and plan every detail that would enhance the experience of being here. And it took time because we have been committed to excellence.

I am so very proud and grateful for the team of professionals who have created the building and garden, and the exhibits and programs; the local, national, and international leaders who have served
on our board and committees; the excellent staff that has grown from one person to now more than twenty; the hundreds of volunteers working countless hours; and the generous individuals and institutions who have provided the necessary financial support.

You are all the stewards of this Museum’s future.

I also want to acknowledge the particularly important leadership and support provided by Congressman Jim Clyburn, the Museum’s first Board Chair and its constant advocate, and former State House of Representatives Member Lucille Whipper, who consistently provided such valuable counsel, and the continued work of the Museum’s current Board Chair Wilbur Johnson.

The International African American Museum has been the most important work of my life, because I believe so strongly that it is long past time that we tell our true history, our country’s history. When we do, we can begin to heal and move forward together.

At this important milestone, I have decided to conclude my active role, serve only as a lifetime member of the board, and devote more of my time to writing and teaching.

I do so with great optimism. In the evening light, the Museum’s distinctive pale golden bricks seem to shimmer. Sun rays leap through the windows. The building appears to be a gatherer of light, reminding us of Dr. King’s famous words: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that.”