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Media release



## Mali's famed Festival au Desert comes home to South Africa's Emthonjeni Arts Residency

The Africans for Africa Network recently announced a North-South collaboration which sees Mali's famed now exiled Festival au Desert make its way to South Africa thanks to the support of Emthonjeni Arts Residency in Eastern Cape.

With this innovative movement being spearheaded through the JT Comms African Media Resource Centre of Excellence, the aim of **Africans for Africa Network** is to engage in a *series of dialogues*, set up exchanges between artists on the continent, create new markets for Africa's cultural content and products and take ownership of the space in which Africa's voice is expressed through music and culture in international arenas.

The Emthonjeni Arts residency programme kicks off the African Caravan for Peace as part of the global call to action and will lead the final leg of Mali's exiled Festival au Desert as part of the post war re-construction campaign to return the festival back to its original home in Timbuktu in January 2014.

Emthonjeni Arts based in Hamburg, in the Eastern Cape, South Africa aligned itself with the Africans for Africa Network to lend support to the objective to change the prevailing narrative of Africa, from one driven by Western media to one that reflects the inherent strengths and empowerment of the continent, across a variety of different, Afro-centred platforms.

The Director of Emthonjeni Arts, a social entrepreneur, listed as one of the top 200 young South Africans by the Mail and Guardian, and a SAMA award-winning performer, Nomsa Mazwai, believes that the initiative will provide a vehicle for both youth and economic development in the cultural industries.

*"As Emthonjeni Arts, a project of the Eastern Cape department of Economic Development Environmental Affairs and Tourism, we are thrilled to be kicking off the Africans for Africa programme with a residency at our facility in the Eastern Cape. The Africans for Africa network articulates what we hope will become the African narrative. One that celebrates our many talents and achievements as Africans. Emthonjeni Arts is a sterling example of an African solution for the economic challenges of the rural poor of South Africa. We look forward to hosting this prestigious residency on an annual basis, as we see it will give hope to young Africans that no matter where you come from, anything is possible in Africa."*

This partnership, the birthing of a North - South cultural conversation, is a global first and will see a melting pot of arts engagements, opening of new markets, collaborations and dialogues.

Manny Ansar, director of the Festival au Desert said, “*We are encouraged by the support in Africa with South Africa leading the call to action*”.

The first of the Africans for Africa Network’s pan African exchanges will be hosted by the Emthonjeni Arts with a two-week long residency with artists from the Malian Festival au Desert in December 2013. Emthonjeni Arts is a multi-disciplinary artists’ residency specifically geared for those with creativity and passion and leaders in new thought. It includes a theatre, a gallery and dance and recording studios. Its aim is to help with the economic regeneration of the small community.

During this residency, there will be cross-cultural dialogues, creations and collaborations between the Mali artists, local Xhosa traditional groups from the local community, a Zulu group lead by legendary storyteller Gcina Mhlophe and cultural leaders and thinkers from the South African creative landscape. There will also be cross-generational dialogue during a session of the residency earmarked for emerging artists and young people.

Two events will be open to the public:

13 December - A festival of ideas - the public is invited to engage and celebrate African ideas that have been, but also share ideas that will mould our future. Celebrate a narrative of Africa that defines us as a people of ideas, a people of innovation and creativity. During this festival a youth dialogue will take place where young leaders and emerging artists will meet to discuss the African Narrative and what it means to them. This dialogue will be podcast to different regions.

14 December - in solidarity with the Festival au Desert on their return to Timbuktu, a re-enactment of the festival will be performed at Emthonjeni, in the heart of our own beautiful dunes. All artists will have a stage in the dunes to perform on; and Oumou Sangare will bless the road to Timbuktu with a performance, an ode and a prayer for the road ahead.

Special South African guest artists with voices that have stood for truth, diversity and peace will also give blessings and join the journey.

Besides the partnership with South Africa’s Emthonjeni Arts and Mali’s renowned ***Festival au Desert***, Perumal also set up partnerships with numerous other African networks: a key stakeholder and trade exchange, ***Webjunkies***, a division of 4sa Technologies (Rajen Govender and Kevin Naidoo); ***IMEXSA, iStart2, SA Women Engineers, Howiviewafrica, Woldegiorgis Ghebrehiwot from Mekelle University, Tigray, Ethiopia; Johnny Muteba from Democratic Republic of Congo; Sam Mokorosi’s Africa The Good News, Gcinamasiko Arts & Heritage Trust - Nozincwadi*** (Dr Gcina Mhlope) and Harem Clothing.

The ***Africans for Africa Network*** is the brainchild of Vanessa Perumal, a Johannesburg-based champion of citizen and media activism and founder of the ***JT Comms African Media Resource Centre of Excellence***

For media enquiries or interview opportunities please contact Dees on [media@jtcomms.co.za](mailto:media@jtcomms.co.za) or 011-788-7631.

Issued by JT Communication Solutions on behalf of Emthonjeni Arts - [www.emthonjeniarts.co.za](http://www.emthonjeniarts.co.za) and the Africans for Africa network – [www.africansforafrica.co.za](http://www.africansforafrica.co.za)