

Sankofa Launch & Premier - 24 April 2003

As we gather together to celebrate the premiere screening of the landmark African film, *SANKOFA*, I welcome you.

On behalf of the Film Resource Unit (FRU) and the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) I extend a special and warm welcome to fellow filmmaker, Haile Gerima, and artist, Mutabaruka, to South Africa. We are proud to be supporting the theatrical release of *SANKOFA*.

As a statutory body, mandated to spearhead the development and equitable redress of the South African film industry, the NFVF is encouraged by such bold moves from the industry.

The film you are about to see is, in itself, a bold undertaking. It examines an important and emotive subject and is pertinent and relevant for South African audiences.

The distribution strategy and promotional approach is also a bold move on the part of FRU.

In the past, releasing African films on the mainstream cinema circuit was often deemed too risky by the major cinema exhibitors. Over the past two years, research and box-office statistics are revealing a healthy appetite and growing demand for films made by African filmmakers. On this occasion, *SANKOFA* is to be released on a semi-independent cinema circuit because we are still striving to create an enabling cinema exhibition environment for African film.

We applaud the tireless and visionary work being done by the Film Resource Unit (FRU) to bring African images to a broad cross-section of communities in South Africa.

Building on past successes like the film *Lumumba* that broke box office expectations and records, we trust that the release of *SANKOFA* will mark a milestone achievement for FRU and therefore the African industry itself.

The NFVF is optimistic about the industry's ability to become a serious contributor to the economy. As more projects featuring multiple partners joining together to ensure multi-platform exposure for product, emerge – we can confidently predict measurable advances in the industry.

The film industry is poised to provide impactful input into supporting the efforts of NEPAD. It is true to say that one of Africa's biggest obstacles to development are the negative portrayal of our countries and its peoples.

Film can play a vital role in portraying positive images of the continent. The developments within the AU also show our leaders striving to work together for the development of the continent.

It is important that we too, as filmmakers, begin to work together more and more to support their endeavours. The innovative launch approach to *SANKOFA* and the NFVF's support of the campaign is evidence of this.

From conception, to production to sales to exhibition, the NFVF believes we all have a moral responsibility to create opportunities for ordinary South Africans to bear influence in the expression of their own images, thereby deepening democracy and creating prosperity.

We congratulate FRU on their past successes and confidently participate in the *SANKOFA* campaign to ensure that more of Africa's sons and daughters are able to see themselves on the big screen, to learn about their history and to engage with the audio-visual medium. Let us watch this film, celebrate the resistance of our ancestors, mourn the tragedies and exorcise the ghosts that haunt our bountiful future.

Enjoy.

I thank you.