



REMARKS BY H.E AMB. MAURICE MAKOLOO IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHAIR OF THE AFRICAN GROUP DURING THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE AUX GAZELLES AFRIQUES FESTIVAL

For Official Use

- Invited to speak as Guest of Honour
 - **Date:** 31st August 2024
 - **Venue:** Rahlgasse 5, 1060, Vienna
 - **Theme:** *Celebrating the Tapestry of African Heritage*
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Distinguished Guests

Artists

Cultural Enthusiasts

Friends

Good Evening / Habari Za Jioni? Guten Abend? Bonsoir.

1. It gives me great pleasure to join you today at the closing ceremony of the Aux Gazelles Art and Cultural Festival “Afriques”.
2. I want to thank Ms. Christine Ruckendorfer for inviting me to speak at this important festival but moreso to appreciate her remarkable personal contributions to the arts, culture and social issues in Austria and beyond. Think about it for a minute: through this festival she has brought Africa to Europe. She has set a table- literally and figuratively for an inter-cultural exchange and an intergenerational connection and conversation. Thank you. Danke schon!

Distinguished Guests

3. A moment such as tonight reminds me of the very immortal words of a wise man in Chinua Achebe’s book THE ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH when he explains to his people why ‘the story is the chief’: “The sounding of the battle drum is important; the fierce waging of the war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards — each is important in its own way. I tell you there is not one of them we could do without. But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle feather, I will say boldly: the story ... so why do I say that the story is chief among his fellows? ... Because it is only the story [that] can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of the war drums and the exploits of brave warriors. It is the story, not the others, that

saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort, without it we are blind.”

4. In different artistic forms, amazing stories have been told this last one month. From the mesmerizing dance performances that have moved our souls to the exquisite artwork that has captivated our eyes, this festival has been a feast for the senses. The "Moroccan Night" transported attendees to the enchanting landscapes of North Africa, while "Ghana Night" highlighted the dynamic arts and traditions of West Africa. The festival showcased "African Cinema," offering a lens into the storytelling prowess of African filmmakers. Music from East Africa filled the air, along with a special tribute to Dakar's artistic legacy. Fashion shows dazzled with the latest African designs, and "Journey Through Africa Through Sounds" immersed the audience in the continent's diverse musical heritage, from Afro beats to various live performances that echoed Africa's rhythm and soul. You have been front row witness tonight.

Ladies and Gentlemen

5. This festival has been more than a celebration of art and culture. It has been a story of Africa. What then is the African story? It is a story of creativity; hope; resilience; love; joy; beauty; pride; resourcefulness; tolerance; yes, a story of inspiration amidst pains and an unwavering spirit in the face of tragedy. Indeed, a celebration of life itself!
6. Friends, brothers and sisters, tonight therefore is an invitation to one and all: to tell more stories – in our own unique ways and with our individual lives. Powerful stories. Stories that remind us that our best days are ahead of us- as Africa, as humanity- especially if we approach that future together!
7. Tonight is an invitation to not view the conclusion of this festival as an end but as a beginning. Let this be a catalyst for continued cultural exchanges, collaboration, and innovation to create platforms that will allow more African artists to showcase their work on a global stage.
8. By building partnerships in arts and culture we also expand opportunities and amplify the impact of creative work- especially because Africa is very youthful. Artists, institutions, and communities can share resources, exchange ideas, and reach broader audiences, ultimately enriching the cultural landscape and ensuring that diverse voices are heard and celebrated.
9. Tonight is a call to our cultural enthusiasts, governments, private sector, academics, diaspora and all people of goodwill to invest in our cultural institutions, galleries, and community groups, to create meaningful partnerships and contribute to the development of the arts and culture sector. In doing these things, we make Africa itself the global cultural and artistic stage that it is!

10. Once again thank you for joining us on this extraordinary journey. May the memories we have created here inspire us to continue celebrating the beauty and diversity of African culture- boldly; unapologetically.

And may we all rise to the call repeated severally in the Anthem of the African Union:

LET US MAKE AFRICA THE TREE OF LIFE.

Shukran! Asante! Medaase! Weebale! Enkosi! Merci.