

**Remarks by the Ambassador of Norway H.E. Susan Eckey on the occasion of the laying of the Foundation Stone of Performing Arts Centre at Makerere University**

**Kampala, 31 March 2017**

Excellencies, Dignitaries from Makerere University, Dear Ann Kristin, Distinguished Guests, Dear Friends of the Arts,

What transcends language, ethnicity, religion, politics and tradition? What makes people really get to understand each other? What is the best way to communicate? Maybe you will agree that it would be through ART. ART expresses human dignity, art expresses what is in our hearts, art is universal. Ugandans are proud of their Ndere Troupe and what they represent, Norwegians are proud of artists such as the young shooting star, singer songwriter Sigrid Raabe. And we all appreciate the work of director Mira Nair and love her latest movie "The Queen of Katwe". They represent many who enrich our life, make us feel, reflect and bring us to another level of consciousness.

A cultural highlight during my stay in Uganda has been the exchange and performances by Ugandan and Norwegian dancers, made possible by the Norwegian College of Dance, Makerere University and the Norwegian Embassy. For the last five years the joint training of Ugandan and Norwegian dancers has translated into friendships and amazing dance performances in Kampala. My art form of choice is dance, I could watch it all day and all night. I must admit to quite a few long nights in the company of YouTube. I also like to dance myself, something altogether different from what we will see at the Dance Festival today and tomorrow. As a tip to those not yet sure about dancing themselves, I can only refer to the magical Gene Kelly (a dancer known to the grey-haired movie going audience) who said: "I got started dancing because I knew it was one way to meet girls".

Dear friends,

The foundation stone that we are laying today is for a Centre that will enable Makerere University and Uganda to raise to the next level in the training and

nurturing of young people of Uganda in further appreciating the role of performing arts within the cultural context of Uganda.

This Performing Arts Center will further cement the role of Makerere as a leading institution of learning and innovation. Uganda is rich in its diversity of cultural heritage and talented young people, and committed professionals willing to mentor them.

A unique aspect of this center is that it is a private public partnership between Makerere and private supporters in Norway. We are happy to note that over the past 40 years of cooperation between Makerere and Norway we are now at a stage where such a cooperation is possible.

Norway and the University of Makerere have enjoyed a long academic cooperation in several areas for more than 40 years.

The Embassy has cooperated with the Norwegian College of Dance and the Department of Performing Arts since 2012. We are proud of our support to the Norwegian College of Dance (NCD) to carry out the before mentioned joint courses together with Makerere Department of Performing Arts and Film (PAF). The ultimate goal of the cooperation is to establish a joint Bachelor of Arts degree and to increase the competence of the department.

Let me highlight some key elements to achieve strong cultural development, which I believe that this centre can contribute to:

- The cultural sector should be diverse, strong and independent.
- Art often comments, reflects, criticises and challenges. Art and culture expand our understanding of ourselves and the society in which we live.
- A free cultural life strengthens freedom of speech, equality and tolerance, development and learning.
- A free and independent culture sector fosters respect and observance of fundamental human rights and contribute to jobs, growth, dialogue and free debate.
- Access to culture and the opportunity to express oneself creatively are important aspects of a modern democracy.

Dear art lovers,

It is a great pleasure for me to lay the foundation stone that marks an important milestone in the journey to establishing a home for the Department of Performing Arts and Film here at Makerere University.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Chairman of Makerere University Council, the Vice Chancellor, and the Principal of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences for the openness and encouragement to the Norwegian College of Dance to partner with you, and reach such a level of cooperation. This is a cooperation of institution to institution. Such cooperation will outlast traditional development support and is the way forward.

I want to thank the Department of Performing Arts and Film and the Norwegian College of Dance for your strong commitment and hard work. The driving forces behind this project, Professor Ann Kristin Norum, Rector of the Norwegian College of Dance, and Dr. Sylvia Nannyonga Tamusuza from Makerere University have made this possible. Thank you for the good work, commitment and sacrifice you have put in to make this possible. Well deserved appreciation of course also go to the private sponsors, without whom this would not have been possible.

Before I conclude, let me quote the exceptional American dance pioneer and choreographer Alvin Ailey, an all-time favorite of NCD Rector Ann Kristin, myself and many, many others. He brought the rhythms, feelings and movements that came with the slaves to the Americas into modern dance in 1958 with his company for African American dancers, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. Ailey said: "Dance is for everybody. I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people".

I wish you the best Dance Festival ever!

Thank you.