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4TH PAN AFRICAN CULTURAL CONGRESS

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**PAPER TITLE: PRESENTATION OF THE AFRICA FASHION
RECEPTION**

PRESENTATION OF THE AFRICA FASHION RECEPTION AT THE
4TH PAN AFRICAN CULTURAL CONGRESS – SOUTH AFRICA

What is the most important thing to man? What is the most important thing to you? Some say food, some say shelter. Others say clothing. You are entitled to whatever your answers are. But I will tell you the correct answer today and that answer you can take to the bank and it will yield profitable interest.

When God created Adam and Eve, the most important thing to man was food and probably shelter. But from the moment they sinned and realized they were naked, clothing shot up to being the most important thing to man. Do you all agree with me? Homeless, hungry and starving people all wear clothes. Even mad people in all their insanity try to cover most parts of their bodies.

What I am getting at is to establish the importance of the fashion and clothing industry in our daily lives. We do not only wear clothes, we also have lots of them. Most people even change their wardrobes quarterly, biannually or annually. This shows the economic value of the fashion and textile industry globally.

As we are all aware, fashion is synonymous to culture. The way we dress identifies us with a particular ethnic cultural background. For instance, when you see a person and you want to guess where the person is from, your best bet is to look closely at the person's dress sense. An American, Chinese, Indian, European, Africans etc can be identified by what they are wearing.

The fashion and Textile industry globally is an annual multi trillion dollar business. In 2006, only one French designer declared a tax free profit of 1.7 billion dollars. So imagine what it will come to if you put the net profit of all the French designers in that same year. Then you can imagine how much these designers are contributing to their country's GDP and their government in terms of taxes.

Let me explain to you a little bit how the business of fashion is conducted. Fashion shows you see are not just for fun or entertainment. They are catalysts to multi-trillion dollar businesses around the world. A fashion designer prepares a collection and presents them in a fashion show. During a fashion show, the people you see seated on the front roles on both sides of the runway are fashion editors, writers and most importantly buyers. When a designer shows a collection, the clothes are either positively or negatively appraised by the press. This appraisal sometimes informs the choice of what the buyers may want to place order for. Whatever the buyers choose from the fashion shows are afterwards reproduced in thousands and sometimes millions in various sizes. These clothes are then distributed in retail shops around the world from where you all buy your clothes off the racks. This is how it works in Europe, Asia, Australia and America.

I run a Nigerian based fashion Promotion Company called Legendary Gold Limited. We started about 22 years ago by reorienting Nigerian designers to look inwards to all locally assembled fabrics, accessories and designs in their production line. We believe the only way we can attract international patronage is to present to Europe, America and Asia products that are alien to them. That means utilizing locally produced fabrics and accessories. After helping Nigerian designers to rediscover themselves through our

local national fashion event called the Nigeria Fashion Show, we started taking them to the catwalk of Paris, Milan, New York, London, Tokyo and so on. This was after we equally reoriented Nigerians to patronize the local designers. Our slogan has been Nigeria Fashion Show says dress Nigerian. The dress Nigerian campaign till date is one of Nigeria's biggest revolution. For your information, the US First Lady, Mrs Obama, Beyonce, Lady Gaga etc all wear clothes made by some Nigerian designers.

Before we started our campaign, it was almost impossible to see Nigerians wear clothes made by local designers or out of local fabrics. Nigerians will all want to wear foreign clothes. For us, it use to be sign of success to wear foreign and expensive clothes. But 5 – 10 years into the dress Nigerian campaign, Nigerians started taking pride in wearing more locally made clothes. Especially with the designers bracing up to the challenge by creating exotic styles and designs you can never find anywhere else. Today, it is in fashion to wear clothes made by local designers with locally produced fabrics and accessories. All our celebrities, captains of industry etc all patronize the local fashion industry. We are not there yet. But the journey has started.

This dress Nigerian campaign has created more jobs for dealers of local textiles, fashion designers, tailors, textile designers and so on in Nigeria. As a result of this success, I was invited to speak at the **International Fashion Incubators Conference** in Perth, Australia in 2011, **United Nations**, New York in March, 2012 and **Fashion Institute of Technology** of the **New York State University** in October, 2012. In all these forums, I was requested to speak on 'empowering women through the various fashion vocations'

Following the success attained in the Nigerian fashion industry, we decided to expand our scope with the goal of bringing these benefits to the rest of the African continent. To this end, the **Africa Fashion Reception** was born. It was launched in Paris in 2013 with the participation of 16 African countries. Last year, 25 countries participated and this year we will be welcoming the participation of over 30 African countries.

The **Africa Fashion Reception** is a Pan African initiative. This year, the event will bring together fashion designers, fashion Icons, First Ladies, Ambassadors, Ministers and media from over 30 African countries in a celebration of cultural diversity expressed through the artistic fashion discipline with the proud theme '**Africa is the new inspiration for global fashion**'

The **Africa Fashion Reception** is aimed at achieving the following objectives using the creative industry of fashion as a vehicle:

- To build bridges by creating free trade and partnerships among fashion practitioners throughout the African continent.
- To attract global attention to Africa's very rich and diversified dress culture which can be explored as a catalyst for the social economic growth of the continent's garment/textile industry.
- To expand the potential power of fashion as a tool of fighting poverty in Africa by creating wealth through the empowerment of women and youths in the various fashion vocations through training, capacity building schemes, workshops and setting up of medium/small scale businesses thereby supporting the **United**

Nations Millennium Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

- To bring about self-reliance as this initiative will create millions of jobs across the continent for Tailors, Creative Directors, Textile designers, Models, Cutters, Pressers, Fashion Photographers & Writers, Hair Stylists, Make-up Artists the list is endless.
- To contribute in bringing the much desired peace and stability to our continent by positively engaging the youths as stated above.
- And to further develop African economies by creating the biggest and most formidable African fashion and lifestyle market for global patronage

Africa is always portrayed as the begging and hungry continent. I do not believe Africa needs aid from anywhere. It is high time we economically empower ourselves. The creative industry of fashion is capable of getting Africa out of poverty.

The fashion industry alone can employ uncountable numbers of skilled and unskilled workers. This can be spread across the textile manufacturing companies, the garment production companies, the fashion designers etc. With well over 1.111 billion people in Africa, we do not need to look too far for market. Africans can successfully do business with itself.

All we need to do is to break down the trade barriers between countries. There is incredible strength in unity. If we all in Africa decide to patronize locally produced fabrics and clothes from our various countries, do we know we are creating unimaginable high volumes of wealth in our continent? Demand will automatically go up for locally produced clothing and accessories. The multiplying effect is that in order to meet up demand, more jobs will be created for fashion designers, local tailors, textile designers, make-up artists, hair stylists, models, fashion photographers, fashion writers, pressers, cutters, illustrators etc. And Africa will be heading towards prosperity

The major goal of the Africa Fashion Reception is to encourage Africans to wear garments produced by African designers. We can make incredible success of this when all countries in Africa trade freely amongst themselves before they venture to the rest of the world. We are not asking us (Africans) to patronize the locally made clothing items and accessories as a mark of favor. We are asking us to wear locally produced African clothing because you look better and special on them.

Trust me. I have seen the best Paris, Milan, London, New York, Tokyo and the rest of the world of fashion have to offer. What you see is the same old stuffs. These designers year in year out just go back to their studio, change one little thing and come out with almost same old stuff. The world of fashion needs an inspiration. And where will that come from? Africa of course. Africa is fast becoming the new inspiration for global fashion. The world has been inspired one time or the other by Europe, America and Asia. Africa is the only continent that has never inspired global fashion. This is more also with our vibrant rainbow-like colors as against the norms of faded white and black.

Guess what? The international fashion industry knows this. But they never want to admit it openly. We have noticed that in the last 7 years, some of the global fashion brands have come to Africa to borrow various inspirations and never gave back in any form to our continent. Till this moment, they are still doing it. So, it is important that we

as Africans organize ourselves properly through the Africa Fashion Reception in order to take full benefits and advantages of the economic dividends inherent in using our rich diversified dress culture to inspire the world of fashion and lifestyle.

The Africa Fashion Reception is a platform created to reorient African designers to look inward for locally produced fabrics, accessories and designs for their production line. When they do this, they will be patronizing and empowering the rural women that weave these fabrics and produce most of the materials used to produce accessories like jewelries, shoes, bags and so on. The multiplying effect is when we empower these women; we will experience lots of prosperity in our communities.

So if we have more of us go out of our way to patronize only the local tailor or designer around us, we will be creating more jobs in our communities and creating more wealth for Africa.

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