

Speech on the occasion of the launch of the *EU Film Weeks 2007* on National Women's Day

Gateway Cinema Nouveau – 9 August 2007

On National Women's Day I am obviously the wrong person to stand here before you. But, you may recall that Maggie Thatcher said, some years back, that “if you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman!”

It is indeed a pleasure for me to join you here tonight, for this, the launch of the 9th European Union film festival to be held in South Africa. Re-branded as the *European Union Film Weeks 2007*, our film extravaganza this year not only maintains the good relations with our Cinema Nouveau partners, but will also, and for the first time, specifically target student audiences at three institutions of learning in South Africa. This now annual fixture on the South African cultural calendar has grown from humble beginnings in the late 1990s to one of the largest foreign film festivals in the country today.

This year's launch shares a platform with the South African National Women's Day celebrations ... and in this context may I say that I am particularly pleased to see so many women amongst our guests tonight.

On the is day in 1996 Nelson Mandela said: “As long as women are bound by poverty and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance. As long as outmoded ways of thinking prevent women from making a meaningful contribution to society, progress will be slow. As long as a nation refuses to acknowledge the equal role of more than half of itself, it is doomed to failure.”

As you surely agree, former President Mandela strove, as does President Mbeki today, for women's emancipation and equality as a pre-requisite for a broader social

transformation ... a challenge that remains as relevant to the 27 Member States of the European Union (and the EU Institutions) as it does to South Africa in 2007.

Gender equality is central to the achievement of the EU's goals on rights, democracy, solidarity, cohesion and competitiveness. The basic principle of equal pay for men and women was introduced in the Treaty of Rome as early as 1957. The treaties now include an arsenal of anti-discrimination clauses ¹.

This year is the EU's 50th Anniversary and while we celebrate the many impressive advances the EU has made on tackling gender bias, discrimination and inequality continue to be a part of everyday life in a year that we have flagged as the European Year of Equal Opportunities.

Our own experience has given us a deep appreciation of the struggles, so often exacerbated by cultural practices and poverty, faced by women throughout the world today.

Like President Mandela some eleven years ago, allow me to flag in this context the ever-present issue of violence against women.

It remains a significant problem within the EU, and as you will be aware, it is no less prominent or serious here in South Africa. As part of our wider commitment of development support to your country – currently in the region of R1 bn annually, it is our privilege to fund the regional *Support to Policing of Crimes against Women and Children in the Eastern Cape* programme. We trust that it provides a good foundation for similar initiatives elsewhere.

Equally we are proud that our grant funding to South Africa has made many women empowerment initiatives possible.

¹ a. Equal rights at work - all rights, not just pay; b. Protection from indirect discrimination and harassment at work; c. Equal rights outside the workplace – such as access to services; d. The chance for the EU to take action other than

Another issue that is increasingly prominent on the international political agenda is that of **migration** – legal, illegal and in pursuit of asylum ... it is one of the most visible challenges of globalisation. The number of migrants world-wide would today constitute the fifth most populous country in the world.

South Africa is no less attractive as a migration destination for peoples from regions north of its borders, most notably Zimbabwe, than what the EU is to peoples from the regions east and south of its perimeter.

With migration often leading to **displacement**, we must find ways to co-operate with our neighbours to jointly combat the root causes of migration - specifically what can be described as key "push factors". I make this point, as it is particularly relevant to women (and children) as their migration can often, but not exclusively, be linked to **exploitation** and in extreme cases, to human **trafficking**. You will find these issues explored in this year's British contribution to our festival – Almost Adult.

The promise of **equality** is a long-term goal that should concern all of us if we are to achieve it in practice - both men and women. Although women have traditionally carried out the struggle for gender equality, it is necessary for the whole of society to be involved in it. This is particularly important in a rapidly globalising world in which gains made on one level are often counteracted by developments on another. The struggle for gender equality is not a women's struggle against men, it is a struggle for justice and human rights for all!

This leads me to ponder how cinema today portrays women. We are all aware of the female mega-stars of the big screen who command enormous following ... and salaries ... (it may not be politically correct to ask whether contemporary cinema increasingly sensationalises sexual roles for women). Looking behind the screen we also find that still today very few films are directed and/or produced by women ... in

fact, out of the 16 films we will screen over the next week, only ONE has been directed by a woman. Is it coincidence that it is called Hidden Flaws?

Let it suffice to say that film still has some way to go.

As in previous years, the *EU Film Weeks 2007* again offer a wide variety of European perspectives. While some of the sixteen films offer the best of European cinema, and some will challenge the viewer, all will offer entertainment.

This Film Festival is possible only due to the dedication of, and close co-operation between, the EU Member States – I single out the German and Portuguese Presidencies this year, the European Commission, and most importantly, our screening partners. Finally, a particular vote of thanks goes to our colleagues of the EU consular corps in Durban who have made this evening an event Greater eThekweni can be proud of.

Do me one favour: spread the message of this event and so, act as ambassadors for this platform of cultural exchange.

Please enjoy the evening!