

Presentation of the German Africa Foundation's Honorary Award 2023

to Alex Moussa Sawadogo

Wednesday, 21 June 2023,

Restaurant Habel am Reichstag, Berlin

Laudatory speech

Dr. Uschi Eid, President of the German Africa Foundation

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of the German Bundestag,

Dear Mr Sawadogo, dear Moussa,

Dear Ambassador Mr Ouoro,

Dear friends of the German Africa Foundation,

I am delighted that so many of you have accepted our invitation to honour a man today whose work I have personally been able to accompany for so many years and whose name is widely known, not only in the Berlin film scene: dear Alex Moussa Sawadogo - a warm welcome to you once again!

It is an honour for us that you are here in person today, because you

- not only commute between Ouagadougou and Berlin,

- but you have also been internationally sought after for your expertise for many years.

- Whether as programme director of various festivals in Germany, Switzerland, South Africa and Israel;

- as a jury member at numerous film festivals or as a consultant, both also across continents, all the way to South Korea.

But let me perhaps start with your artistic roots:

During your studies of art history at the University of Ouagadougou, you already worked in some cultural projects in your home country. You were especially engaged in the fields of "film" and "contemporary dance". Even then, you were involved in the pan-African film festival FESPACO, of which you have since become the curator.

After your Master's degree, you came to Germany to further specialise in exactly these two branches of art - film and dance - at the Hamburg Institute for Culture and Media Management.

The contrast between the cultural worlds was certainly big and challenging, because the education in a French-influenced system in Burkina Faso is more theoretical in nature and

you wanted to add the practical side of the German school, at least that's what you once said in an interview.

In 2005, the job of press and cultural officer at the Burkina Faso embassy finally brought you to Berlin.

It didn't take you long to notice that something was missing in this city - or rather in this country: the presence of films and filmmakers from Africa. And you wouldn't be you if you had accepted this situation so easily.

So, in 2007, together with friends, you founded the association *toucouleur* to promote intercultural dialogue between Germany and Africa - a task you pursue with incomparable passion and great success to this day.

Despite all the financial hurdles, you as an inspiring force, equipped with incredible optimism, your infectious commitment and enthusiasm, were able to bring together and hold together this team, which with the film festival has become a firm pillar in the local cultural scene.

And it is through this association that you have been able to close the gap in Germany's cultural scene with the film festival.

It all began by showing the now very well-known film "Ezra" by Nigerian director Newton Aduaka, then winner of the Grand Prize of the FESPACO Film Festival, at the Filmtheater am Hackeschen Markt with *toucouleur* in its founding year, 2007.

One year later, in November 2008, the first real AFRIKAMERA festival was held under the title "African Screens - New Cinema from Africa" at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

It showed eight films around the complex theme of identity and migration. All the films came from the programme of the FESPACO Festival 2007. Already at this first edition of AFRIKAMERA, there were talks with the directors and also a panel discussion that shed light on the potentials and perspectives of cinema from Africa.

The exchange with the audience is part of your mission:

- to bring cinema from Africa closer to German audiences and to show
- films that would not usually make it into German cinemas.
- To enter into everyday worlds,
- tell personal stories
- You want to change the way we look at the continent by showing its realities undisguised.

The medium of film is particularly suitable for critically questioning the familiar and replacing the images in our heads with new, more diverse ones.

And so, from the very beginning, I was convinced of the vision and goals of the festival, of your vision, dear Moussa, which is why I agreed to take on the patronage of AFRIKAMERA right at the start.

In my archives I have now found the many pleading letters I sent out in the early years to important governmental and private institutions, soliciting financial support for the film festival... this unfortunately with very mixed results in the beginning....

When we celebrated the 10th anniversary in 2017 - Honorary Consul Exner, Ambassador Blumberger-Sauerteig, President Köhler and his wife were also present at the time - I could hardly believe that this festival had lasted so long without a solid financial foundation - but thanks to your persistence and persuasion, dear Moussa, and the professionalism of your team, you had made it.

Of course, it was not only me who recognised the potential, no, you have been able to convince many others with your work and always win more partners.

High-ranking guests, from the field of film, such as Wim Wenders, and also from politics, such as former Federal Presidents Joachim Gauck and Horst Köhler, are proof of the recognition of your valuable work.

Even under the most difficult conditions during the Corona pandemic, you did not give up and got an online version of AFRIKAMERA up and running with your team. The last festival in 2022 - then again in presence - showed almost four times as many films as the 1st edition in 2008, a magnificent development!

Dear guests, at this point a short "commercial break": Please note the week from 14 to 19 November 2023 in your calendars, where you can once again expect a great AFRIKAMERA programme.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

let me say a few words about the importance of AFRIKAMERA beyond the promotion of cinematic art and the work of Moussa Sawadogo.

AFRIKAMERA not only offers an artistic showcase for a differentiated image of Africa, but also provides important impulses for German-African cooperation. The film presentations are always accompanied by a supporting programme. Numerous workshops and symposia in Berlin and in selected African countries serve as a platform for international filmmakers to exchange knowledge and initiate further cooperation. An important focus is always the promotion of young filmmakers. This is an important transfer of know-how that cannot be valued highly enough.

The films shown also convey messages to the individual countries in which the stories told in the films take place by showing the everyday life there in an honest way and thus giving impulses for possible changes.

Especially in recent years, the festival has offered a platform to young filmmakers with political films. The promotion of this young generation is a personal concern of yours, dear Moussa.

For example, in 2016 you initiated the Ouaga Film Lab, a platform that connects young African talents with international advisors. This promotes the competitiveness of their works and thus also access to international financing. In order to support francophone artists in

particular, you also became the managing director of the "Jeune Création Francophone" fund in 2018.

One could think that your day has more than 24 hours, because in 2020 you also took over the artistic direction of the largest pan-African film festival FESPACO, which takes place every two years in Ouagadougou.

It is worth noting that you did not take on the new task unthinkingly, because it was only when you received the third call that you accepted and took over the festival, which had existed for 50 years, in the midst of the Corona pandemic under very special conditions. In order to give as many Burkinabé as possible the opportunity to participate, regardless of their access to the internet, it took place in presence and was a huge success.

Let me briefly mention the second passion, which is less known to many here: contemporary dance.

I already mentioned that you had already discovered this particular art form for yourself during your studies. When one thinks of dances from Africa, our idea is probably rather one-dimensional here too. And this is exactly where your work comes in: Breaking down stereotypes and old thought patterns.

Let me quote you from an interview in the taz in 2011: "It would be nice if the majority of the German public no longer perceived Africa as a homogeneous giant construct and its dance world as a colourful folklore show. You are right!"

The first dance festival you organised with the same team as the film festival was "Border Border Express" in 2011 at the Theater Hebbel am Ufer, in 2013 the festival "Timbuktu is back" was institutionalised. Until 2019, dance performances from the Sahel countries were shown every two years, thus becoming a meeting place for the exchange for a region that was becoming increasingly unstable politically.

These developments, be it in the field of politics, human rights, freedom of expression and peace, were reflected in the dances. Here, too, you have made an important contribution, giving a German audience new access to African culture and joie de vivre. A new perspective, a new approach to political expression.

This is where your work and that of the German Africa Foundation meet: both of us have the great goal of sharpening the image of Africa in German society, presenting the realities and realities of life in a differentiated way, overcoming clichés and stereotypes.

Whereby art can reach people, overcome divides and borders and be a door opener for peace, where politics sometimes does not get you anywhere.

Dear Moussa,

It is a great pleasure for us to honour your work and to present you with the Honorary Award of the German Africa Foundation.

On behalf of the German Africa Foundation, I wish you continued success in your creative work and always the freedom and the right companions at your side to realise your visions - and perhaps one or two others among us will join you this evening.

Dear Moussa,
congratulations!