

GOETHE MEDAL 2016

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY AKINBODE AKINBIYI

WEIMAR, 28 AUGUST 2016

- Check against delivery -

Honoured Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Dear Eva Leithof,

Moments like this award ceremony are often difficult to experience completely and mindfully: there are too many profound impressions and stirring sensations. Even now as I say thank you, I am deeply moved and hardly able to clearly and simply say this thank you aloud.

Thank you for the years of intensive collaboration on exhibitions, workshops, master classes, portfolio reviews, conversations in different places. In Johannesburg, in Addis, in Khartoum, in Bamako, in Dakar and especially in Lagos. But also time and again in Berlin. I would like to mention two people who are sadly no longer with us. Renate Albertson-Marton, director of Goethe Lagos in the 1990s, who worked with so much love and commitment on behalf of the culture and arts scene in Nigeria. And Henrike Grohs, a close friend, who died so unexpectedly and sadly in a terrorist attack in Grand Bassam, Ivory Coast. Henrike also gave so much for the development of various cultural and artistic projects, both in southern and in western Africa.

Friendship unites us. Cordial, intense days and weeks spent together unite us even more. The months and years serenely run their courses, seemingly untouched by our lesser and greater pleasures, by our crises and horrific disasters. It is this serenity, this perpetual continuity and almost constant vibration that I have tried to master all these years. In this, my close relationship with Goethe has played a major role: like I said, the friendships, the successful cooperation, the shared pleasures we experienced so often.

I cannot praise this attachment enough. It's fabulous to arrive in Johannesburg and, at the arranged meeting point in the airport, to already encounter the friendly laughter of the institute driver. He, too, is an element of the ensuing days and sometimes weeks of exciting activities and projects. And so, from the inconspicuous least to the answerable greatest, we are all involved in truly mutual, constructive activities.

With all my heart, thanks to everyone I have met and worked with together all these years. Thanks for the moments of deepest joy and innermost vibrations.