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Speech by Ila Kasem, Chair of the Board of the Prince Claus Fund, on the occasion of the 2019 Prince Claus Awards at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam on 4 December 2019

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear laureates, partners and friends of the Prince Claus Fund,

A warm welcome to you all, also on behalf of Joumana El Zein Khoury, the Director of the Prince Claus Fund, who unfortunately can't be with us today. She is not able to attend this year's events for medical reasons, but looks forward to seeing you again in the near future.

So, you will have to do it with me this year.

I also want to take a brief moment to express the Fund's great sadness at the untimely death of a beloved member of the Awards Committee, Tejumola Olaniyan. Teju was a rigorous academic. He was deeply knowledgeable about African drama, literature and culture, a vibrant personality and a great friend of the Prince Claus Fund. His presence on the Awards Committee will be sorely missed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In September, when I first assumed the role of Chair of the Prince Claus Fund's Board, I had many questions. I knew about the Fund because I had served on the Cultural Emergency Response steering committee between 2005-2011. But of course, as a new Chair, I still had a lot to learn.

One of the insights I got, is that there's a lot more to the Prince Claus Fund than I already knew about. I was happy to see that the Awards Ceremony – that has brought us together now – still is at the top of the Fund's agenda.

So we're here today to honour the achievements of six extraordinary individuals and an outstanding organisation. The Laureates happen all to be women, which is significant, but we'll hear more about how that came about from Manuel de Rivero, the Chair of the Awards Committee.

Awards are a great reason for celebration, but they're much more than that. Awards make a statement. They encourage and support more outstanding work and give Laureates as role models a much broader stage to reach new audiences with their art and alternative stories and to show the impact of their work.

For the Fund, offering that stage might mean doing even more than we are doing now, with and for Laureates. We have started exploring those possibilities, so you'll be hearing more in the future.

But the Awards Ceremony only happens once a year.

The rest of the year, the Prince Claus Fund is very busy supporting arts and culture in other ways. Many of you will have your own stories of how the Prince Claus Fund has inspired or supported you in some way.



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We keep challenging ourselves to stay relevant in this world of rapidly accelerating change and apparently conflicting realities. Is the Prince Claus Fund agile enough? Can it deliver real impact, working in so many ways in so many areas?

What I soon realised – if I can personify the Fund – is that it meets these challenges because the Fund is a listener; it is a dancer; it remains flexible; it takes risks...but it takes them responsibly. The Fund does its research. It constantly consults many people in and around the field.

Our partners - many of you here today - are a rich resource. You come from all disciplines and all corners of the world and offer good advice. You know the situation now, and your concerns signal trends that may arise elsewhere.

Another major way the Fund keeps on its toes is through its support of young and emerging artists, Exchanges like the one this past year that linked up Dutch hip-hop stars with their Senegalese counterparts keep the Fund's finger on the pulse of what's happening.

Demand for support continues to increase, and looking ahead, I wonder, how will we continue to manage? How can we make a more sustained impact?

The Prince Claus Fund has always been about exceptional people: our Laureates, our partners and our own team. They will remain at the Fund's core! Going forward we will focus more on strengthening our relationships with our Laureates, as role models and change agents.

My strong belief in the work of the Fund is sounding like a laudation to the Fund itself, which wasn't what I intended. But these were some answers to my questions of how the Fund will manage to stay relevant, efficient and effective. The Prince Claus Fund is likely always to stay modest-sized, but going into the future, it will adapt, because it is a fast dancer, with a strong foundation.

Thank You.