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**Word of Welcome and Closing Remarks by Joumana El Zein Khoury, director of the Prince Claus Fund, on the occasion of the 2018 Prince Claus Awards at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam on 6 December 2018**

**Word of Welcome**

Wow! What beautiful energy! What a wonderful way to start off this Awards Ceremony – with a Love Duet by Dada Masilo and Xola Willie from South Africa.

Your Majesties, your Highnesses, Excellencies, dear friends, welcome to this celebration of the 2018 Prince Claus Awards. Once again we will be honouring a remarkable group of cultural practitioners from all over the world, people and organisations who are making a difference in their own communities and in the world at large. Some of you may have taken the opportunity to get to know their work at Louder than Words last night in the Compagnietheatre. If so, you will be glad to see them again, and if not, you have delights in store.

I just want to mention that the Fund has had a very busy year. You might think ‘that’s nothing new’ but in 2018, we DID take on things that are new. Most notably, alongside our other work, we launched the Next Generation programme, which promotes and supports cultural expression among young people. As the mother of three who are sliding into teenager-hood, I know how important it is to encourage young people, to provide good models, get them involved and make space for their enormous creativity.

This Next Generation programme is making the Fund feel younger, too, in some essential way. We’ve reached out to young people here in the Netherlands and put them together with their creative counterparts in other parts of the world. This fall we even found ourselves playing video games highlighting different cultures at the Culture Arcade in our Gallery.

We have been busy on other fronts, too. In August, we organised a course in Brabant to train professionals in the rescue of all forms of cultural heritage. They came from all over the world, including the Netherlands, because protecting and preserving our cultural heritage is a concern for everybody.

So we’ve been busy. But we always look forward to December and this happy moment when we can all be together and celebrate. Shortly HRH Prince Constantijn will be called to the stage to hand out this year’s awards, and after the awards have been received, Dada Masilo will be back, along with members of the South African Dance Factory, for the ‘Spirit Dance’ – Dada’s own choreographic adaptation from the ballet Gisele.

But first, many of you may wonder how this magical process of finding and selecting amazing creative people and cultural organisations doing outstanding things actually works. So today, as a special treat, I’ve asked a member of the selection committee, Manuel de Rivero, architect and urbanist from Peru, to come and tell us briefly what it’s like on the Prince Claus Awards Committee. Manuel?

## Closing Remarks

Thank you, Henk. What a beautiful goodbye. In it we can see all the qualities that have made you such an important and valued head of our Board. We will miss you terribly, but wish you all the best in the next phase of your life.

Your moving words have made it harder, however, for me to follow with a formal closing of thank you's. Still, thanks are always important. And maybe it's appropriate that we began this ceremony with a love duet and we end with an expression of love and appreciation.

First of all, from the heart – thanks to the Dutch Foreign Ministry and the Dutch Postcode Lottery for your unwavering, long-term support.

We are ever grateful for our Torchbearers, corporate sponsors and our international and domestic partners and collaborators for your support - it makes so much more possible.

Thanks to the Luxury Hotels of Amsterdam and KLM for bringing our international partners here safely and making them feel welcome in Amsterdam. Your help and reception make all the difference! Thank you, too, to the Palace, for giving us this special place to honour our laureates.

Thanks to Irma Boom, whose innovative design remains our distinctive hallmark.

Manuel has given us a peek into the hard work of the Awards Committee; thanks to all of you on the committee and to all the nominators and advisors who help in the very difficult selection process, not to mention our tireless Awards coordinator Fariba Derakhshani and hard-working staff for making today possible.

Henk Pröpper is stepping down, but he leaves a fine Board behind - thanks to you all for your dedication.

Lastly, to all of YOU who have come and support the Fund, along with the thousands of people and organisations who are not here, but form our great network, and share our passion for culture: to you all, a deeply grateful thank you.

I hope you will all stay for the reception. But when you finally leave the Palace, my colleagues will be handing out colorful bags that contain this year's Awards Book. The bags were woven by indigenous women in the Philippines, under the supervision of this year's laureate Kidlat Tahimik. He told me these bags come with a powerful story – the legend of how a simple back strap-loom\* weaver became the Goddess of the Winds of the Ifugao tribe.

Inhabian, the weaver, was busy weaving a loincloth. She had tied her loom strings to a tree, with the back strap around her waist. The Gods were feeling naughty and decided to test her. They started blowing powerful gusts of wind in her direction. She started to soar but her back strap kept her anchored like a tight seat belt and she clung for her life against those powerful winds. Finally, the



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Gods grew tired of their game and were impressed by the feisty woman. They anointed Inhabian as Goddess of the Winds.

Kidlat says that just before the Prince Claus Fund ordered the bags for the Awards ceremony, category-5 winds of typhoon Ompong swept over the northern Philippines. A similar typhoon 4 years ago left 10,000 people dead. Although this year the women weavers were safe, the damage to crops and houses caused by the typhoon meant that our order provided welcome income to pay for repairs and purchase food.

So perhaps the bag you choose has been touched by Inhabian the Goddess of the Winds.

Please allow the Royal Family, laureates and the Press to exit first. Then please move to the back of the hall for a few minutes so we can remove the chairs to give room for the reception to start.

I hope the Market Photo Workshop and all the 2018 laureates have broadened your world as much as they've broadened mine!