

## **IFA LETHU FOUNDATION**

Bruce Haigh Cocktail Party, 11 July 2012

By

Dr Anna Mokgokong, Acting Chair, Ifa Lethu Foundation

### **Honourable Minister, Mr Bruce Haigh, and Distinguished Guests**

On behalf of the Board of the Ifa Lethu Foundation and CEO Dr Narissa Ramdhani, thank you for joining us this evening and welcome to you all.

Many of you may not know, but our honoured guest is responsible for us being here tonight, responsible for the very existence of our organization, the Ifa Lethu Foundation, and responsible for taking risks that could have seen him and fellow diplomats expelled from South Africa during the dark days of the 1970s and 80s. I am, of course, referring to one of our Founding donors Mr Bruce Haigh. And Mr. Haigh has continued to remain involved in the work of Ifa Lethu and the South African heritage scene.

Bruce was appointed second secretary at the Australian embassy in South Africa and his anti-apartheid views and activities knew no bounds. He was well acquainted with activist Steve Biko, the Biko family and helped smuggle the journalist Donald Woods out of South Africa in the 1970s. Another now retired diplomat, Diane Johnstone, who was the Australian embassy's third secretary in South Africa from 1974 to 1976, also showed great interest in the cultural scene in the townships, at a time when the art works of black artists held no perceived value in the country.

Like other diplomats, Johnstone held private exhibitions of black artists' work in her home. Haigh continued the tradition. Diplomats and journalists bought the art for their collections. Bruce has related how these gatherings would turn into a

weekend party with a lot of music and parties; everyone, including the artists, would come.

At the first exhibition in 1974, the artists were promised that the collections would be brought home to South Africa when the country had black majority rule.

Bruce and Di set the scene for diplomats and businesspeople across the world to unselfishly and generously donate their precious collections – totaling approximately 45 works – to Ifa Lethu in 2005. Today the Ifa Lethu collection numbers over 400 works and has been exhibited in the USA, Canada, UK (for the 2012 Olympic Games), Australia, just last month in France for the Saison South Africa. Locally, the collection was South Africa premier art exhibition held for the 2010 Soccer World Cup and since then has been shown in all corners of the country to inspire our youth, assist in social cohesion and healing, and to demonstrate an important part of their heritage.

But the role of the art works has not been limited to mere exhibitions. Realising the need to leverage arts and heritage for national impact priorities such as youth development and employment creation, Ifa Lethu embarked on the development path in 2007 by introducing its creative entrepreneurial development programmes in the rural nodes of South Africa. Those struggle era artists still with us were involved in workshops, explaining techniques, and more importantly their passion behind their creations. From these humble beginnings in Mamalodi, Ifa Lethu has grown into the largest development organization in the heritage sector, having trained over 2000 young people as creative entrepreneurs, with successful business being grown in many of our geographically isolated areas such as Ngove, Msinga and Elim.. Bruce – you started all this!

Today, we have installed our well branded *Creative Hands Business Incubators* in four provinces, a mobile 'Creative Hands' workshop that travels deep into rural areas to train craftspeople, sculptors, fashion designers and fossil casters to up

their game to produce export quality products of many different kinds, and business training to put their careers on a sustainable basis to sustain their families.

In addition, we have identified other heritage skills in short supply, such as fossil casting, and together with Professor Lee Berger from the Origins Centre of the University of the Witwatersrand, have to date trained in excess of 30 fossil casters, of which 12 now own their own business, with others in full time employment at the Cradle of Humankind, Wits, the Ditsong museums, and Ifa Lethu. Our fossil casting programme has been recognized by anthropologists and museums across the globe.

So Bruce, when you kept your promise and gifted your 17 beautiful artworks back to their homeland, I'm sure even you could never have imagined some of these outcomes.

We don't get many opportunities to honour and thank you, so we are thrilled that you are here with us tonight, with your lovely family. It is our honour to be able to thank you again, and to recognize you own indomitable spirit. Ladies and gentlemen – let us raise our glasses to Mr Bruce Haigh.