



FOCUS FEATURES ESTABLISHES PROGRAM FOR AFRICAN FILMMAKERS; SHORT FILMS TO BE MADE WITH FINANCING FROM PROGRAM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK, June 24, 2008 – In an initiative earmarked exclusively for emerging filmmakers of African nationality and residence, Focus Features has established the Africa First Program. Africa First is offering participating filmmakers the chance to be awarded \$10,000 in financing for production and/or post-production on their narrative short film made in continental Africa and tapping the resources of the film industry there. Complete details on Africa First – including application information – can be accessed through www.filminfocus.com/africafirst. Focus CEO James Schamus made the announcement today.

Offering practical support in addition to the fiscal backing, an international advisory board of experts in African cinema has been convened. The Africa First board members are Ms. Mahen Bonetti, founder and executive director of the African Film Festival; journalist and documentary filmmaker Ms. Jihan El-Tahiri; Ms. June Givanni, who for four years programmed the Toronto International Film Festival's Planet Africa series; Mr. Gaston Kaboré, filmmaker and professor; Mr. Pedro Pimenta, manager of training programs throughout South Africa; and Mr. Keith Shiri, founder/director of the Africa at the Pictures film festival in the U.K.

Africa First was conceived by producer Kisha Imani Cameron (...*Sometimes in April*), whose Completion Films company has a first-look and consulting deal with Focus. Focus creative executive Matthew Plouffe will coordinate Africa First submissions and evaluations with Ms. Cameron, who will supervise the program. In addition to on-site work in Africa, a weekend of workshops in New York City with board members is also planned.

Mr. Schamus said, "It's about time the American film industry took a more active interest in the enormous filmmaking talents emerging in Africa. Everyone at Focus is excited to be a part of this initiative."

Ms. Cameron added, "As an independent producer myself, I'm always listening for new voices. Filmmakers selected for the grants will retain the copyrights to their projects as well as artistic, budgetary, and editorial control. But throughout the process – and, ideally, beyond – the team at Focus will lend them support."

(more)

Five (5) filmmakers will be awarded \$10,000 apiece. The submission period began on May 12th, 2008 and runs through July 15th, 2008. The five filmmakers selected will retain distribution rights to their completed shorts, with the exception of North American rights; Focus will have those, as well as the right of first negotiation to productions derived from the shorts, such as a feature-length expansion.

Completion is developing feature, documentary, and television projects. Its president, Ms. Cameron, previously worked as director of development at Walden Media, and as an executive at New Line Cinema, where she oversaw the development and production of Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*.

Focus Features (www.filminfocus.com) exists to produce, acquire and distribute original and daring films that challenge the mainstream to embrace and enjoy voices and visions from around the world that deliver global commercial success.

Upcoming Focus Features releases include Andrew Fleming's irreverent comedy *Hamlet 2*, starring Steve Coogan; Joel and Ethan Coen's *Burn After Reading*, starring George Clooney, Frances McDormand, John Malkovich, Tilda Swinton, Richard Jenkins, and Brad Pitt, which will world-premiere as the opening-night film of the 2008 Venice International Film Festival; Henry Selick's 3-D stop-motion animated feature *Coraline*, starring Dakota Fanning and Teri Hatcher; Shane Acker's animated fantasy epic *9*, starring Elijah Wood and Jennifer Connelly; Cary Fukunaga's immigrant thriller *Sin Nombre*; writer/director Jim Jarmusch's new film, tentatively titled *The Limits of Control*, starring Isaach De Bankolé; a contemporary comedy directed by Academy Award winner Sam Mendes and starring John Krasinski and Maya Rudolph; and Gus Van Sant's *Milk*, starring Sean Penn as Harvey Milk.

Focus Features is part of NBC Universal, one of the world's leading media and entertainment companies in the development, production, and marketing of entertainment, news, and information to a global audience. Formed in May 2004 through the combining of NBC and Vivendi Universal Entertainment, NBC Universal owns and operates a valuable portfolio of news and entertainment networks, a premier motion picture company, significant television production operations, a leading television stations group, and world-renowned theme parks. NBC Universal is 80% owned by General Electric and 20% owned by Vivendi.

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