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Laudation: Diébédo Francis Kéré

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Diébédo Francis Kéré was born in 1965 in the village of Gando in Burkina Faso, West Africa. Due to the fact that there was no school in his village, he was sent by his father, Chieftain of Gando, to the city at the age of seven. He successfully completed a carpentry apprenticeship, received a scholarship from the non-profit organisation Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft, to receive training in development aid in Germany. Kéré went on to sit his A-levels and then successfully completed a degree in Architecture at the Technical University (TU) Berlin. In 1998, in the course of his studies, Kéré developed the idea with the help of friends to collect donations to build a primary school in Gando. Building work on his school – which was also his undergraduate project – in Gando was completed in 2004. In the same year, Kéré received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

This was followed by numerous major awards including the Swiss Architectural Award 2010 and the Marcus Prize for Architecture from the University of Wisconsin 2011.

The primary school in Gando was extended, it saw the construction of a library, a school garden and a house for teachers; this was followed by a secondary school. Current construction work is for a cultural centre. With these buildings, Kéré has succeeded in such an exemplary way in allowing his fellow citizens in Gando to participate in an education which he had been allowed to enjoy as the first child in his village.

Together with numerous friends and colleagues, who were able to be convinced by the charismatic style of Diébédo Francis Kéré, he used these projects and buildings to deliver a significant improvement in the basic living standards experienced by those living in countries broadly considered to be the poorest in the world.

As a synthesis between an ethical attitude and an architectural design approach of equal appeal and appropriateness, Kéré has succeeded within a short space of time in drawing international attention to the necessity of school education in the far-flung regions of the globe. This holistic approach also incorporates landscaping and ecological considerations. Kéré is not afraid to break free from established approaches or construction methods in this regard, if these do not correspond with societal development or the climate at local level.

Diébédo Francis Kéré is now a much sought-after architect for exhibitions – for example at the Museum of Modern Art Small Scale, Big Change, or of late in London at the Royal Academy of Art. As a university lecturer he has also taught at institutions including Harvard University and in Mendrisio.

His office is also currently working on projects in Asia and Europe. Naturally, this direct method of building has challenged the spirit of architectural innovation in Africa, given the extremely limited financial resources: material procurement and production methods, forms of expression and function must be relevant to the greatest degree possible at local level. What has now become a labyrinth of laws, norms and prejudices in so-called "developed" countries, is not yet present in so-called "underdeveloped" countries. Innovations can, however, develop from this innocence, which can hold greater long-

term cultural value over the highly technical systems and products currently on offer from industrialised nations.

Kéré's work represents direct bottom up assistance for the continued development of a vibrant society. As a consequence of this initiative and within the framework of such appropriate architecture, a self-reliant, independent generation of people is gradually beginning to develop. Kéré thus proves that architecture can have both a fundamental reason for existence as well as a profound and every day meaning for people. That is a lot in times of media excess.