

The Nelson Mandela Foundation Approves BSMAA's Annual Mandela Humanitarian Award Event

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Vira Lynn Jones, Executive Director with Sello Hatang, Executive Officer, the Nelson Mandela Foundation

The Bedford-Stuyvesant Museum of African Art (BSMAA) has received an official letter from the South African-based Nelson Mandela Foundation sanctioning its annual event as the Madiba Humanitarian Award: Celebrating the Legacy of Nelson Mandela. Ruth Carter, the costume designer for the Black Panther movie, will be honored at the fourth annual event, Saturday, October 13th at the Brooklyn Museum from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. This year's theme is: "Education: A Forceful Weapon Empowering the World's Children." BSMAA has held its Annual Nelson Mandela Humanitarian Award event since 2014.

"This year is very special," said Vira Lynn Jones, the Executive Director and founder of the Bedford Stuyvesant-based museum. "Nelson Mandela would have been 100 this year. BSMAA has planned an incredible party with music and entertainment to celebrate the life and legacy of this incredible man."

Jones went to some lengths to get in touch with the right people to make this year's tribute a great and legitimate one. She was directed to Sello Hatang, the Chief Executive of

the South African-based Nelson Mandela Foundation. Jones met with Mr. Hatang in September 2017 when he visited Harlem.

"Mr. Hatang even approved BSMAA's request to commission an artist to create a bust of Nelson Mandela that Waterford Crystal in Ireland would produce in crystal," said Jones. "Since it would be

and not sold, BSMAA was given the Foundation's approval to create a bust likeness of the late South African President." Jones noted that prominent Brooklyn artist, Otto Neals, has been working on a rendering.

During their September 2017 meeting, Mr. Hatang explained that the Nelson Mandela Foundation had licensed the brand name the "Nelson Mandela Humanitarian Award" to the United Nations. Every five years, the General Assembly selected two laureates, a woman and a man, who have dedicated their lives to the service to humanity by promoting the purposes and principles of the United Nations while honoring and paying homage to Nelson Mandela's extraordinary life and legacy. Namibian ophthalmologist Dr. Helena Ndume was selected as the first female recipient because she has dedicated her life to treating blindness and eye-related illnesses in her country and throughout Africa. The male recipient was a former President of Portugal, Jorge Fernando Branco, who has dedicated his efforts to restore democracy in his country.

"I told Mr. Hatang I felt the United Nations list would select many prominent and world-renowned individuals for its award. I explained to him that were so many people working on the grass-roots level making incredible contributions toward humanity. These individuals never receive the recognition they deserve. Nelson Mandela was a very humble man and I know he would have embraced these people," Jones said. "I also reached back to 1990 and give Mr. Hatang a background history lesson about Mr. Mandela's historical visit to the Bedford Stuyvesant community in Brooklyn."

"I explained to him that the late South African President's first stop in New York was not to rub shoulders with celebrities. Instead, he traveled to Bedford-Stuyvesant. He visited the Boys and Girls High School where the athletic track and field have since been renamed to honor Mr. Mandela. "I also told him there was another school, the Mandela High School for Social Justice, located inside the building."

Jones remembered Mr. Hatang sitting forward in his chair, laughed and said, "You can call it the 'Madiba' Humanitarian Award: Celebrating the Legacy of Nelson Mandela. The name 'Madiba' is a very endearing term for Mr. Mandela in South Africa. When I return to South Africa, I will instruct the staff member in charge of writing official letters to e-mail you an official letter." A month later, Jones said she received the official letter via e-mail.

"When the letter arrived in my e-mail, you would have thought that someone was killing me in my apartment. I ran through each room while screaming because I was so excited. I was fist-bumping the walls with my hands," Jones said.