



## Petition against 'visa discrimination' after Zimbabwean group was forced to cancel their tour

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A petition was started 'against EU visa discrimination of musicians' after a forced cancellation of the European tour of young Zimbabwean artists Mokoomba due to blocked visas.

On 8 June 2009 the two organisations *Jeunesses Musicales International* and *Music Crossroads* announced that they had been forced to cancel the European tour of young Zimbabwean artists Mokoomba due to blocked visas. The organisations started a petition where they write:

"Music events across Europe are important global villages — uniting local and international artists, providing intercultural learning opportunities, promoting peace and respect. Yet power lies in the hands of those deciding on visas to dictate which artists, and from which countries, are welcome behind the walls of fortress Europe to let their voices be heard.

Visa obstructions to the young Zimbabwean group Mokoomba in the wake of their European tour raises major concerns over the future of cultural diversity on the European stage.

In the lead up to their European Tour, they were dubbed 'The Next Generation of Zimbabwean Hope' — in celebration of their incredible talent and story of diversity and perseverance, the group coming from one of Zimbabwe's smallest rural villages, and singing in Tonga, a language foreign to even the majority Ndebele and Shona speaking population of Zimbabwe.

"Difficult, inflexible, and un-transparent visa procedures have led the music community to a crisis point. Many concert organisers are no longer able to take the risk in booking artists from countries where visas are required, knowing what issues may arise later when artists are blocked behind borders" Blasko Smilevski, JMI secretary general, is quoted as saying. "It is not difficult to guess which countries' artists will be cut out of the picture."

### Convention: 'facilitating access'

In 2006, the European Union signed the *UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity*, committing Europe to develop "measures in developed countries with a view to facilitating access to their territory for cultural activities from developing countries," yet administrative procedures have yet to reflect these good intentions.

Band leader Abundance Mutori, whose songs speak of social ills, the HIV pandemic, love and a Zimbabwean nation determined never to give up hope said "we believe the potential for Tonga music is still to be explored and will one day reach the world at large".

The Mokoomba tour is part of the Music Crossroads programme, the largest youth empowerment programme in Southern Africa, supported and funded by the Government authorities in Norway, Spain and Sweden.

"It is an ironic tragedy that Mokoomba has been barred from taking the stage in countries who helped create the dream," said Blasko Smilevski.

Don't let visa regulations restrict cultural exchange between Europe and the rest of the world, please join us and sign this petition.

Contact European Commission President Barroso and demand a review of visa procedures for artists from 'developing countries'."

### **Not ready on time**

The arts group Mokoomba took their name after the resort town of Victoria Falls where they are based. The group shot to prominence after winning the first prize at the Music Crossroads InterRegional Festival in Lilongwe in Malawi in August 2008. Since then, they have been working to expand their repertoire and have been doing intense sessions with Music Crossroads International's Band Manager Poney Gross. They have recorded and produced a CD made other preparations for the six member band's tour which would have seen them performing in Spain, Holland, Belgium, UK, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Slovenia and Croatia.

Quoting Music Crossroads director Dag Franzén, the Zimbabwe Telegraph wrote:

"After insurmountable visa hassles and around-the-clock efforts to obtain these precious documents — only one week before the first concert — we have had, for the first time in Music Crossroads' history, to realise that visas will not be ready on time and, finally forced to succumb to European countries' immigration offices ignorance, indifference and formalism,"

### **Sign the petition**

Thepetitionsite.com:

**'Access Denied: Petition Against EU VISA Discrimination of Musicians'**