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CONTACT: C. Zawadi Morris
The Vox Public Relations
646-367-3414

**SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR GIRLS IN AFRICA
INSPIRES FUNDRAISER IN NEW YORK CITY**
*Angelique Kidjo, Donna Karan, Liya Kebede and Vanessa Redgrave
Join Mothers and Their Daughters to Launch “Batonga”*

New York, NY— On Tuesday, November 13th, from 6:30 – 9:00 p.m., at the Bohlen Foundation in New York City, West African singer, songwriter and UNICEF International Goodwill Ambassador Angelique Kidjo, actress Vanessa Redgrave, designer Donna Karan and model Liya Kebede will host a fundraiser for “Batonga,” Kidjo’s non-profit organization that builds support for secondary and higher education for girls in Africa.

Angelique Kidjo, a native of Benin, first debuted onto the U.S. music scene in the early nineties, with her Grammy nominated song “Batonga” (Oremi, 1991). “Batonga” is a word Kidjo made up as a child, an exclamation of freedom and independence. Seven albums (and a total of four Grammy nominations) later, Kidjo has carved out for herself a sustainable way to leverage her growing fame to change the way the world views Africa.

In her role with Batonga and UNICEF, Brooklyn-based Kidjo performs internationally to raise awareness about the importance of educating girls in Africa. Until recently, financial support for educating girls in Africa rarely extended beyond the sixth grade. Batonga grants scholarships, builds schools and improves the quality of curricula for girls across Africa in secondary school and higher education.

“The most cost-effective way to fight poverty and improve conditions in Africa is to educate girls,” says Kidjo. “Educating girls beyond secondary school translates to higher economic productivity, reduced child mortality and more importantly, it gives girls alternative choices to marriage that they otherwise would not have.”

Batonga began its work internationally in May 2007, enrolling more than 400 girls in secondary school and universities across Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mali and Sierra Leone. In addition to providing scholarships to enable girls to go to school, Batonga helps the girls become independent thinkers and leaders in their communities. The program also provides women mentors as role models, supplementary curricula, and advocacy towards improving teaching standards.

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The November 13th fundraiser will mark the official launch of Batonga, with an invite-only reception followed by a VIP dinner. The reception will be held at the Bohem Foundation, 415 West 13th Street, from 6:30 – 9:00 p.m. Angelique Kidjo will perform, joined by the renowned African Children's Choir. The dinner afterwards will be provided by Marcus Samuelsson and his new pan-African restaurant, Merkato 55, from 9:00 – 12:00.

“Educating girls in Africa gives them the strength and the tools they need to be the mothers of change,” Kidjo said when launching Batonga. “My mother was educated and she fought for me to go to school, despite pressure from many in our extended family who argued that only boys should be educated. Once an African woman is educated, she fights to ensure both sons and daughters receive an education. From this is born a tradition that is passed on and grows from family to family, from generation to generation—a tradition that can change the future for Africa.”

Kidjo's daughter Naima, age 14, is part of the Batonga Junior Committee that includes girls from various backgrounds in NYC that have decided to contribute their time and resources to help the girls of Batonga. Their first task is to get other teenagers to attend the launch, although all members agreed that boys should be invited as well. The members worked with popular jewelry designer Joanna Bengoa to create a sterling silver and leather wristband based on the Batonga logo. These will be given to all 18 years-old or under who purchase specially priced tickets for the launch.

To ensure the campaign's appeal with young audiences, Batonga has empowered its Junior Committee to help with formulating and driving online social networks and new media in fun and creative ways. By employing an approach normally utilized by corporate brand giants (such as Adidas and Nike), Batonga is going beyond a MySpace profile and Facebook group, engaging young people and raising awareness for the cause through new and interesting elements that take advantage of the viral characteristics of social networks such as Meez.com to spread the message.

“Sometimes we categorize so much about life that we forget about the things that are universal: The right to education is universal because it represents freedom, it represents change,” states Kidjo. “The need is clear and our call-to-action is simple.”

For press credentials, contact C. Zawadi Morris at 646-367-3414. For more information about Batonga, visit www.batongafoundation.org. For more information and to buy tickets, visit www.batongafoundation.org/event.