

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving the opportunity to present to you my company and its aims. I started my company last year. This year I launched my brand Bantu Styles and opened a first shop in Belgium. The incorporation of my company Bantu Styles did not happen overnight. Bantu Styles was born as a milestone in a long process of reflection, planning and searching. I had to consider many options on what to sell, what to create, but above all how I could give meaning to this important project.

My company designs, manufactures and markets fashion accessories. All my creations are marketed under one brand of fashion accessories and jewels: Bantu Styles. Bantu means 'people', but also 'all of us' in my vernacular language Bemba, which is spoken mainly in Northern Zambia. 'Styles' in the name refers to a concept of beauty and fashion. Although African inspired this fashion is meant for all regardless of race, creed or nationality.

My collection of jewels, fashion items and accessories form the core of my business. I want to reach the highest standards of creativity and quality. In order to achieve the highest standards I have invested much time and effort in finding reliable partners for the supply of the materials. I have also searched for workshops and craftspeople that I can depend on to produce fashion accessories and jewels of high quality. Today, the accessories and jewels are produced by small workshop in different African countries. With them I have worked on introducing rigorous and western inspired concept of quality management and standards. Reliability, stability and punctuality in fulfilling orders will remain key priorities in my collaboration with my partner workshops.

Bantu Styles aims to sell its products in the upper middle segment of the markets in Europe and in the future perhaps North America. The choice of materials and the required craftsmanship are import cost factors. Not only to cover the costs, but equally for marketing purposes Bantu Styles offers its products both retail and wholesale at higher prices. We believe that low prices would make potential customers doubt the quality and uniqueness of our range. This strategy applies especially to our leather ware, mainly hand and travel bags. It is also applied to our Safari clothing line and other accessories. I work together with my African partners on Bantu Styles as a project. I want them to progress if my endeavours succeed. I want to distribute the benefits from our collaboration in a fair manner.

Today I would like to discuss with you our plans to design, produce and sell our jewellery. The jewels are presently made in different African countries. Our aim is not to produce run of the mill trinkets. Our jewellery consists of original creations, made to limited numbers each. We aim to provide the market with African inspired earrings, rings, bracelets and necklaces of the highest quality. Pricing is value based. We are able to service the upper middle segment of the Western market, mainly through our choice of raw materials: silver and half-precious gemstones. Using the crystals of amethyst, tourmaline, garnet and other less expensive gems allows us to produce attractive and high-quality jewellery, which can be marketed for prices the targeted market segment is prepared to pay.

However, we intend to produce most of our jewellery in Zambia. Producing and investing in Zambia has many advantages for my company. Zambia is a stable country. Since its independence it has never been subject to internal strife and conflict. It has an open free market economy, which allows for a free flow of goods and capital. Equipment, certain raw materials may have to be imported. In Zambia this is a comparatively easy process. The designs originate from our company, but can be altered and improved upon by the craftspeople that we work with. Communication is also an important aspect of our drive for the quality control of our products. This means that communication and an exchange of views are extremely important. I am a Zambian and can speak most of the vernacular languages of my country.

Zambia is also endowed with a great variety in gemstones. Next to the world famous, but very expensive emerald, the country's mines produce fine quality aquamarine, citrine, amethyst, garnet, tourmaline and many others. Through the mines directly or through brokers neatly polished and cut gemstones can be obtained in the country. Silver is used as the primary material. This is readily available for our partner workshops.

The transportation of the jewellery is not a problem. Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, has good connections with the neighbouring countries, Europe and the rest of the world. Different specialised courier services operate from its international airport.

My project offers a good opportunity for indigenous craftspeople to add value to raw materials, gemstones and their skills. This includes the people who cut and polish gemstones. Since Bantu Styles will only use in its jewellery the gemstones considered as only semi-precious, the added value will exceed the one presently obtained from exporting the minerals, often raw or half-processed.

Bantu Styles has opened its first showroom and store in Antwerp, Belgium in June 2006. It offers customers and professional buyers an opportunity to explore our range of fashion accessories and jewellery. A distributor has been found for the South of England. She is based in Maidenhead, United Kingdom. She will assist me in entering the United Kingdom market.

Bantu Styles is a new company. My aims are high, but I do believe firmly that I can succeed. Organising production in African countries and working with a large number of partners with different backgrounds does not always run equally smooth. Quality and steadiness of supply requires substantial investment. It forces me to travel extensively. Quality comes at the price of good, but expensive equipment for the workshops. My partners in Zambia and other African countries do not have the means to acquire financing for investments aimed to improve productivity and quality.

To a financial institution lending or financing a company with creative and novel products is always difficult. If the idea follows a downtrodden path where so many have already been, the product may not be able to compete with those already on the market. On the other hand the market may not accept an inspirationally new product. I have gone ahead and invested my personal money onto this project. Some retail chains have expressed interest in my products. If I do receive larger orders, I will need additional financing for the required raw materials. In addition I will have to finance part of the operating costs of my partner workshops in Africa. To them obtaining financing may prove even more difficult than it is to me as a company registered in Belgium. To sustain the supply of high quality goods some additional investment in machinery for the partner workshops may be required. For this structural and long-term investment I will try and seek assistance through grants or loans from organisations that want to assist the economic development in Africa.

But Bantu Styles is more about people, than it is about products and items. It is important that I can convey the message that is carried in the Bantu Styles label. Bantu Styles aims to bring people together. It wants to teach the indigenous peoples of Europe the value of the African concept and ideas about beauty. Fashion in clothing and jewellery is an expression, language that can bring different people together. Like with music, it can open the hearts of people to the unknown, in my case the Africans living in Europe.

On the other hand I want to provide my African customers an opportunity to express their identity with pride. My creations and fashion items are all made from African materials. The designs are inspired by Africa, but equally by the modern practicality of European urban life. Africans can be proud of their contribution to world culture. I want to be proud of my contribution to the fashion of all people, regardless of their race, creed or nationality.

Bantu is a dream turned into reality. The task before me is daunting. But I see this as an opportunity to express my personality and the many positive aspects I have discovered in the African being and culture. I want to give a positive message about how African like me can be a constructive part of any society in Europe. Life is an expression. Bantu Styles wants to give the African flavour to fashion and life to all that want to embrace it.

Thank you for your kind attention.