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AIIA 2025 GALA & DINNER

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Alkebulan Immigrants Impact Awards 2025 Honors Social Impact and Reshapes Migration Narratives

The Alkebulan Immigrants Impact Awards (AIIA) 2025 brought together diplomats, business leaders, artists, and community champions on Friday, 10 October, at the NH Hotel in Sandton for an unforgettable evening of celebration. The gala served as the grand finale to the two-day Immigration 20 (I-20) Summit, affirming the transformative role immigrants and refugees play in shaping South Africa's cultural, social, and economic landscape.



Family photo: AIIA 2025 Award Recipients

Ambassador Mauricio Montalvo from the Embassy of Ecuador, Representatives from the Embassy of the Republic of Congo, Embassy of Ivory Coast, Embassy of Uganda, Embassy of Mali, Embassy of Somalia, Embassy of Pakistan, Representatives from the Pan-African Parliament, Advocate Batlokoa Makong of the African Peer Review Mechanism, C20 Chairperson, Mr Thulani Tshefuta, C20 Sherpa, Mr Mabalane Mfundisi

In her welcome address, co-founder and CEO Linda Ben remarked, *"We gather not merely to celebrate, but to recognize the brilliance of those who have crossed borders and transformed challenges into triumphs. Tonight, we honor dreamers, achievers, and changemakers - immigrants who have redefined what it means to belong, to build, and to lead."*

Reflecting on the two-day I-20 Summit, Ms. Ben added, *"Immigrants are not problems to be solved but possibilities to be unleashed. Migration is not a statistic, it is a story of people who have turned exile into excellence, displacement into discovery, and barriers into bridges."* Master of Ceremonies Elma Akob acknowledged the judges and members of the C20 working group, Yvonne Baldwin-Mushi, Sipetile Sixishe, and Dr. Luz-Helena Hanauer for their expertise in shaping the Summit's outcomes.

Thulani Tshefuta, C20 South Africa Chairperson, summarized the discussions. *"We have had tough but necessary conversations. You cannot apply policing solutions to social and economic challenges. There can be no free trade without free movement. You cannot ask for full cream milk while rejecting the cow."* His remarks drew laughter and reflection, reinforcing the link between mobility, trade, and inclusive growth.

The evening opened with a flag procession symbolizing unity, followed by a stirring rendition of the South African national anthem. A short documentary on AIIA's evolution set the tone for an event defined by inspiration and pride. Indian performer Amritha Naveen then delivered a graceful cultural performance that captured the evening's spirit of diversity.

The evening's performances showcased the vibrancy of global culture. The Cameroon Dance Group brought high energy to the stage, Casa dos Poveiros Rancho shared Portuguese coastal traditions, and the Ngabi Cultural Dance Troupe from Uganda closed with a rousing performance that honored Dr. Okonera.



2025 AIIA Award Winners

The awards ceremony celebrated excellence across nine categories, honoring individuals whose impact transcends borders.

- **Ubuntu Award:** Sabelo Ndimande, South African community leader and author, for his unwavering solidarity with immigrant communities.
- **Community Service Award:** Carole Poreti, founder of the Valued Citizens Initiative, for over two decades of leadership and citizenship education that unite South Africans and immigrants alike.
- **Leadership Award:** Dr. Fayez Tembon, environmental educator and founder of Fakanam Green School of Excellence, for advancing sustainability and policy reform.
- **South African Flag Carrier (Vida D'Or) Award:** Madame Venetia Estelle Guinard, impact investor and promoter of intra-African trade, for carrying the South African spirit beyond its borders.
- **Education and STEM Award:** Dr. Joseph Musonda-Shamwe, genetic researcher, for groundbreaking work on the relationship between genetics, diet, and heart health in African populations.
- **Entrepreneurship and Business Award:** Dr. Opelewa Akinradewo, senior lecturer and researcher, for innovation in blockchain technology and sustainable construction.
- **Organisational Diversity Award:** Professor Achille Mbembe, historian and political scientist at the University of the Witwatersrand and visiting professor at Harvard University, for championing inclusivity and intellectual diversity.
- **Inspirational Woman Award:** Angela Yeung, award-winning jewelry designer, entrepreneur, and Mount Everest summiteer, for her resilience and advocacy against gender-based violence.
- **Lifetime Achievement Award:** Ambassador Dr. Agnes Vera Ikatekit Okonera, veterinarian, cultural leader, and human rights advocate, for over four decades of service advancing women's empowerment and diaspora inclusion. Her emotional acceptance speech, recounting moments of discrimination and perseverance, drew a standing ovation.

The program also included a keynote address by Abdou Samb and a diplomatic segment highlighting international collaboration on migration policy.

Looking Ahead

In closing, Tebo GN, Chief Operating Officer of AIIA, reflected on the event's success and reaffirmed the organization's commitment to shaping inclusive narratives. Attendees concluded the evening with networking and photographs, celebrating new connections and shared purpose.

The 2025 Alkebulan Immigrants Impact Awards stood out not only as a recognition of excellence but also as a catalyst for policy dialogue and social transformation. By celebrating those who build bridges across borders, AIIA continues to champion a South Africa where every immigrant is seen, valued, and welcomed.

About the Alkebulan Immigrants Impact Awards (AIIA)

The Alkebulan Immigrants Impact Awards is South Africa's leading platform honoring the contributions of immigrants and refugees. Through a transparent nomination and selection process, AIIA promotes inclusion, challenges stereotypes, and celebrates the vital role of migration in nation building. "Alkebulan," an ancient name for Africa, reflects a shared heritage of unity and resilience. AIIA's broader initiatives include the annual I-20 Summit and the Global Heritage Festival.



Dr. Agnes Vera Ikatekit Okonera, AIIA 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

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