

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka to be awarded Cannes LionHeart

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, United Nations under-secretary-general and executive director of UN Women, has been awarded the 2019 Cannes LionHeart in recognition of her advocacy for women, human rights and social justice throughout the world, and for her leadership of the industry-wide diversity initiative, The Unstereotype Alliance.



Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Throughout her career, Mlambo-Ngcuka has championed women's rights through her involvement with projects and programmes devoted to education, women's empowerment and gender equality, and in 2018 was named by Apolitical as one of the most influential people in gender policy around the world. Her work spans the private sector, civil society and government.

Introduced in 2014, the Cannes LionHeart is an honorary award presented to a person or organisation that has harnessed their position to make a significant and positive difference to the world around us, with particular reference to those who work with brands and the advertising community.

Uniting leaders to tackle stereotypes

Mlambo-Ngcuka's leadership of the Unstereotype Alliance recognises the power of partnerships to accelerate progress and her involvement has been pivotal to creating a space where industry leaders can set aside competition and unite for a common cause. As the powerhouse behind the initiative, which launched in 2017, she unites leaders to tackle the widespread prevalence of stereotypes that are often perpetuated through media and advertising content.

Philip Thomas, chairman of Cannes Lions said, “Phumzile’s passion and tireless work to improve the lives women and children around the world and bring about social justice represents the true embodiment of the Cannes LionHeart Award. Through her work on the Unstereotype Alliance she has brought together leader from business, technology and creative industries to consciously consider how individuals are in communications.”



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As executive director of UN Women, Mlambo-Ngcuka is driving the role of women in leadership, engaging men as allies, and ending discrimination and violence against women and girls through coalition and movement building among global leaders in public and private sectors, and with civil society.

Speaking in response to the announcement, Mlambo-Ngcuka said, “It is an honour to be nominated for this award on behalf of UN Women and The Unstereotype Alliance. I look forward to what we will do next through this partnership to change the way the world looks at itself and disrupt the social norms that are holding us back. We are thrilled to be working with the advertising community to bring about positive change by influencing the way that both women and men are represented.”

Addressing gender bias

An industry-led initiative, The Unstereotype Alliance, convened by UN Women, is a collaboration between industry leaders who have been champions of addressing gender bias. Its members include global brand advertising agencies and holding companies, associations and organisations dedicated to advancing representation.



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Since its launch in 2017, the initiative has worked with members to conduct international research projects providing applicable insights for creating progressive portrayals of men and women from around the world. In addition, Mlambo-Ngcuka and The Unstereotype Alliance collaborated with Cannes Lions to introduce updated jury guidelines for the judging process, urging jury members to consider whether the work perpetuates negative stereotypes and inequalities.

Mlambo-Ngcuka will be interviewed on the Debussy stage on Friday, 21 June as the final session of the content programme. She will accept the LionHeart Award at the final Awards Show closing out Cannes Lions 2019.