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SIFF CALLS ON 'THE FIRST GRADER' FOR OPENING NIGHT GALA

The inspiring story of an 84-year-old Kenyan man's fight for education, and equality

Seattle, WA – The 37th Seattle International Film Festival, the largest and most highly-attended event of its kind in the United States, has selected *The First Grader* to be shown on Thursday, May 19 at Seattle Center's McCaw Hall as part of this year's Opening Night Gala. Written by Emmy-winner Ann Peacock (*The Chronicles of Narnia*) and directed by Opening Night special guest, Justin Chadwick, the film tells the remarkable story of an 84-year-old Kenyan villager determined to seize his last chance to get the education he could never afford.

One of the most inspirational films of the year, *The First Grader* delivers the true story of Maruge (Oliver Litondo), an 84-year-old former Mau Mau fighter who uses a Kenyan government initiative to claim the primary education he has always wanted. Joining his fight is a passionately progressive young teacher, Jane (Naomie Harris), who risks her career for his cause. With uninhibited performances by the children and humor woven throughout, *The First Grader* passionately underscores how the power of education can deliver the greatest freedom of all.

Acclaimed at festivals around the world including: the London Film Festival; the Telluride Film Festival; the Doha Tribeca Film Festival where it won the audience award; and the Toronto Film Festival where it was runner-up for most popular film second only to *The King's Speech*. Released by National Geographic Entertainment.

"I chose this film for our Opening Night Gala because of its entertaining, yet insightful presentation of the power of education, said SIFF Artistic Director, Carl Spence. "It aligns and passionately underscores SIFF's overarching goals of promoting film as a medium that fosters cross-cultural communication, education and internal understanding."

OPENING NIGHT GALA

The Opening Night Gala will take place at Seattle Center's Exhibition Hall immediately following the film screening with drinks provided by Don Q Rums, Stella Artois and Barefoot Wines and Bubbly. Appetizers and desserts will be provided by the Festival's catering partners @ The Peak Café, Blue Moon Burgers, Buca di Beppo, Cupcake Royale, Dilettante, Ivar's Seafood,

Joey Restaurants, Plum Bistro, Salumi, Sweet Iron Waffles, Tidbit Bistro and Zatz a Better Bagel with Red Carpet Experience catering provided by Savor.

Tickets for the Opening Night Gala are \$50 (SIFF Members \$45), with premium tickets available for \$100 (SIFF Members \$90) and a Red Carpet Opening Night Experience package – including valet parking, a private pre-screening reception, access to the post-screening VIP Lounge and a gift bag – available for \$200.

ADDITIONAL FESTIVAL VENUES

SIFF is also pleased to announce our 2011 Festival venues, including: SIFF Cinema, IMAX at Pacific Science Center, Pacific Place Cinemas, Benaroya Hall, Admiral Theater, Neptune Theatre, Harvard Exit Theatre, Egyptian Theatre, SIFF Lounge at Boom Noodle, Triple Door, with the Closing Gala and Reception to be held at Cinerama. Metro area venues outside of downtown Seattle are Everett Performing Arts Center, Renton IKEA Performing Arts Center, and Kirkland Performance Center.

To purchase tickets for the Opening Night Gala and for more information about this year's festival go to SIFF.net.

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About SIFF

Now in its 37th year, the Seattle International Film Festival is the largest and most highly-attended film festival in the United States, showcasing more than 400 films from over 60 countries to an audience of 150,000 attendees annually. In the fall of 2011, SIFF will open the SIFF Film Center at Seattle Center's Alki Room, thereby fulfilling its long-standing vision of creating a permanent home where SIFF's successful film, education, and community outreach programs can thrive.

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