

Black Panther draws crowds at UN



The 3 October screening of the blockbuster "Black Panther" film at UN Headquarters -- under the banner of the International Decade for People of African Descent -- attracted large crowds and featured production designer Hannah Beachler, who explained how she and her team created the fictional African country of Wakanda.

"Black Panther – a ground-breaking Afro-centric story – is an excellent fit for the Decade's programme and objectives, as it advances powerful portrayals of people of African descent," Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications Alison Smale said in her opening remarks at the event.

The evening screening of the Marvel film, organized by the Department of Public Information and the NGO Most Influential People of African Descent, attracted an illustrious crowd, including the President and First Lady of Sierra Leone, Nigerian star actress Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde, MTV show host Quddus, and explorer Mario Rigby who recently completed an epic two-year walk across Africa.

The attention, however, was on Hannah Beachler, the production designer for Black Panther. "My part was to create basically everything you see in the movie," she said, "I designed Wakanda."

About 90 per cent of what viewers see in the film was physically constructed from the designs Ms. Beachler and her team created. One set took nine months to build.

It was a deeply personal film for everyone involved, she explained, allowing the cast and crew to explore their identities as African-Americans and their relationship to Africa.

The first step for Ms. Beachler was to visit the continent. As an African-American, she needed to experience Africa and the diversity of African cultures in order to create a place where her heritage, the wider diaspora as well as Africa itself were represented, she said. The idea was to create a fictional country "where pain and oppression did not exist, and people were enlightened," she explained. "We wanted to show a hopeful future."

In line with the positive message of the film, the Most Influential People of African Descent, who co-sponsored the screening, "are changing the narrative about Africa and its diaspora by highlighting excellence worldwide," founder Kamil Olufowobi emphasized in his remarks.