



## **Fashion bridges: great turn-out for the business and educational round tables in Johannesburg and online**

Date:

10/28/2021

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As part of the project Fashion Bridges – I ponti della moda created by the Italian Embassy in Pretoria in cooperation with Polimoda Fashion School and the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, and with the support of South African Fashion Week (SAFW ), ITA Agency, Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana and Nelson Mandela Forum, aimed at promoting an innovative partnership between Italian and South African fashion industries – on October 27th, two events in hybrid format were held at the Westcliff Hotel in Johannesburg (with a virtual audience of about 1,200 members) aimed at companies in the sector, and schools and fashion institutes of the two countries.

While opening the round table “Exploring and developing new market opportunities”, Ambassador Paolo Cuculi focused on the relevant commercial opportunities that an increased synergy between Italian and South African economic operators could open up, in light of the strong complementarity between the two supply chains. In fact, creativity and innovation have always characterized our fashion industry, while South Africa has quality raw materials and intends to raise the quality of its textile and clothing products.

Analysis that, together with the priority to be attributed to the issues of sustainability and social inclusion, was shared by Mark Goliath, of the South African Industrial Development Corporation, by the President of Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana Carlo Capasa, by the Secretary General of Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana Alberto Scaccioni, by the CEO of

SAFW, Lucilla Booyzen, and by the President of the Association of Italian Manufacturers of Machinery for the Textile Industry Alessandro Zucchi.

From the other sessions dedicated to the wool and mohair sectors (fiber of which South Africa is the world's leading producer), cotton, leather and silk – in which 18 Italian and South African companies and trade associations took part – a convinced willingness to deepen the prospects for industrial cooperation, in order to consolidate the respective value chains and increase their competitiveness on international markets, also thanks to a more widespread digitalization of production processes.

14 "business to business" meetings organized by the ITA Agency represented a significant operational development of the initiative.

After the success of the collaboration between young Italian and South African designers in the first phase of “Fashion Bridges” (actualized with the creation of four collections presented recently at the “Milan Fashion Week” and now exhibited at the “South African Fashion Week”), the panel “Creativity and sustainability in education” emphasised the remarkable potentiality that new partnership between Italian and South African Fashion Schools can provide to the education of future stylists, underlining the need to integrate them with the principle of “sustainability in Fashion”.

The debate – opened by Madam Ambassador Oriana Mannaioli Cuculi, the project’s creator together with SAFW’s CEO Lucilla Booyzen – highlighted the keen interest showed by all the participants to structure this cooperation with a long-term approach, on the basis of a productive interaction between Italy and South Africa’s cultures.

The research of a balance between creativity and sustainability, also in educational programs, has been the common denominator of the contributions of Polimoda Firenze Director Massimiliano Giornetti (who underlined how inclusiveness and sustainability are principles that inspire the main Fashion Institute’s programs), Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana representative Paola Arosio, Milano Fashion Institute Director Nicola Guerini, African Research Institute Director (Erica de Greef) and Elizabeth Galloway Academy of Fashion Design Directors (Fona Abdo and Ines Shaw).

The concept of sustainability has been analysed in several aspects, including the need to balance the respect of ethical values and economic constraints. A large space has been set aside to topics such as the digitalization of the sector, the development of new professional figures (for example “Product Sustainability Manager”), the incentives in order that the Fashion Industry can be orientated towards production processes that are actually sustainable – the Sicilian start-up Orange Fiber, which produces fabrics from citrus by-products, gave a concrete virtuous example of that – and the need to align educational programs to requests coming from the job market.