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Dear colleagues, friends and supporters of Mali's cultural heritage,

It has been some time since we met in Berlin in June. I do hope these lines find you well. This circular is meant to inform you about the German efforts to support SAVAMA's and IHERIAB's struggle to save the Timbuktu manuscripts, West Africa's written history and one of the world's great cultural treasures. Before discussing this topic, though, please allow me to congratulate Dr Abdel Kader Haïdara on behalf of all my colleagues in Hamburg for being awarded the renowned "Deutsche Afrika-Preis" (German Africa Award) of the Deutsche Afrika-Stiftung (German Africa Foundation).

As agreed at the Berlin meeting, we will do our best to contribute to transparency and use the funds entrusted to us by the German Foreign Office and Gerda Henkel Foundation in an effective way. Thanks to our colleague Professor Michael Bollig from the University of Cologne, another German foundation – the Jutta Vogel Stiftung in Cologne – has decided to enhance the German efforts by contributing to the co-manager's salary as of 2015.

After discussing the quickest and most efficient way of ensuring action on the ground, it was decided to hand over most of the EUR 500,000 pledged by the German Foreign Office to SAVAMA directly to allow speedy action to be taken. The final details of the budget were discussed when Dr Haïdara and Dr Mahmoud Abdou Zouber came over to Hamburg together with the secretary-general of the German Africa Foundation, Elmar Frank, to visit CSMC the day after the ceremony in Berlin. At present, we are waiting for the German administration to clear the funds. For details about the items covered by this budget, please consult the appendix.

Contrary to what was said in Berlin, Dr Haïdara suggested the libraries in Timbuktu should start to be renovated now to assure the owners that their precious books and documents will be returned to Timbuktu as soon as possible. This is reflected in the budget and will complement the efforts of LuxDev (renovation of 12 libraries) and UNESCO (renovation of four libraries).

As those of you present in Berlin will remember, there was a discussion about the most appropriate boxes to be used for storing the manuscripts. There were strong voices from conservators suggesting that the modern, cost-effective boxes ought to be used, while Dr Haïdara wanted to continue with those he has been producing up to now. In order not to delay the conservation measures with any further debating, it was agreed to use the "expensive" boxes during this phase of the project and discuss this topic again in more detail in 2015.

For administrative reasons, it has not been possible to employ anyone to fill the co-managerial position. We intend to announce the position as soon as we know whether the German Foreign Office is going to continue funding the “Safeguarding” project; the funds originally allocated to that undertaking were diverted to support IHERIAB.

We also discussed the importance of research in Berlin. Dr Dmitry Bondarev has received a grant from the Gerda Henkel Foundation to study *ajami* (African languages written in Arabic script) in Timbuktu manuscripts. The project will commence in 2015. Dr Haïdara is aware that the main goal of the Gerda Henkel Foundation is research and has expressed his willingness to support the international scholarly community. He suggested topics for research (dating, identification of certain manuscripts) to which CSMC’s manuscript lab might contribute. The topics to be discussed at the next meeting will also include the following: co-operation with the University of Bamako, scholarships for Malian students to study conservation science or to do PhD research, and establishing a working network of scholars of West African manuscripts.

Dr Bondarev will most probably go to Bamako in December and meet Prof Columba Stewart there, who is Director of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, which is funding and organising the digitisation of the Timbuktu manuscripts. Eva Brozowsky, our conservator, will take up training missions again in 2015.

We will inform you about any further progress regarding the German safeguarding efforts in the next issue and look forward to hearing your comments and any additional news you might have.

Best regards,



Michael Friedrich
Director, CSMC



Dmitry Bondarev
Head of West Africa projects, CSMC

