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**African Economic Development Solutions Cancels Little Africa Festival, Redirects Resources to Crisis Response**

African Economic Development Solutions (AEDS) will not host the Little Africa Festival and Parade in 2026. Instead, the organization will redirect all resources to emergency support for small businesses struggling in Minnesota.

For 12 years, the Little Africa Festival and Parade has been a place of joy, connection, and pride. The event draws thousands of attendees annually to celebrate African culture and entrepreneurship. It has served as one of the Twin Cities' largest cultural celebrations and a cornerstone for Saint Paul's African immigrant community, bringing families together and creating space for artists and small businesses to shine.

The decision to cancel the festival is a very difficult one that follows urgent conversations with community members and small business owners who report dramatic drops in sales, empty storefronts, and mounting fears about safety and economic survival.

"At AEDS, we follow where our people are," said Dr. Gene Gelgelu, Founder, President and CEO of African Economic Development Solutions. "Right now, many of our entrepreneurs navigate fear, uncertainty, and financial strain. They see significant drops in customer traffic. Others worry about their safety, their families, and the viability of their businesses."

To address these urgent needs, AEDS will deploy staff and resources typically dedicated to festival planning toward technical assistance, financial guidance, and one-on-one business support to help enterprises survive the crisis.

Many immigrant-owned businesses across the Twin Cities are facing immediate threats to their viability. Entrepreneurs in AEDS' network report customers staying home, delayed payments, and daily anxiety disrupting operations.

In moments like this, AEDS believes its responsibility is to show up in ways that help. The Little Africa Festival and Parade will return. But right now, supporting the survival and stability of small businesses must come first.

The organization views this pivot as both a strategic response to urgent community needs and a commitment to its core mission of standing with small businesses through crises and building a stronger economic future for the community.

AEDS thanks artists, vendors, sponsors, and community partners for their understanding and continued support.

### **About African Economic Development Solutions**

African Economic Development Solutions (AEDS) builds economic, community, and social wealth in African immigrant communities by supporting entrepreneurs and small business owners through technical assistance, access to capital, and community-driven initiatives. Based in Minnesota, AEDS serves as a vital resource for economic empowerment across the African diaspora.