An open letter from the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival to Laurent Wauquiez, President of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Regional Council

« We are delighted to be a regular partner of the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival, which exactly matches our cultural vision for rigor and accessibility. »

Dear Minister, President of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Regional Council, you pronounced the above words in your editorial for our 2020 catalogue.

This past Friday, 12 May, the standing committee approved reducing by over 50% the subsidies that the Clermont-Ferrand International Film Festival receives. In addition to this reduction, the coming weeks could see a new decision against the organization Sauve qui peut le court métrage concerning the activities of the Auvergne Film Commission. This means that the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region would cease being our foremost public source of funding.

In the short term, this endangers the Festival and its Short Film Market, our activities throughout the year involving all types of audiences, and of course the jobs that are connected to them. The reduction, which represents nearly 8% of the Festival's total budget, comes after this year's Festival has already been held. We have no savings to use to offset the financial loss and the costs we've incurred. And add in the context of the post-Covid crisis which hit our resources hard even though our organization has always been recognized for its exemplary financial management (60% subsidized, 40% self-financed). You cannot be unaware of our situation given the numerous warnings we've given you about this risk.

Mr. President, in your editorial for our most recent catalogue, you wrote that you were “particularly attached to the Festival”, which “is an immense source of pride for our region” and shows that “cinema's influence does not end at the city of Lyon”. You stated that the Festival is “a huge public gathering, ... a splendid means of transmission”. The gap between what you said and what you have done is all too clear.
You also wrote that the Festival is “a powerful asset in making our region economically attractive”. Precisely. Each euro of publicly invested funds generates twenty-two euros for the area. The Region’s reduction in support will impact the area in terms of cultural, social and tourist activities. Even if we’re only talking about raw numbers, culture has greater direct economic importance than the automotive industry. It represents thousands of jobs; it is at the heart of technological innovations and the area’s influence abroad. But we prefer to talk about ideas: Culture nurtures individual minds, collective thoughts, critical thinking about the world and about future generations of citizens.

More broadly, you may perhaps have noticed from the outpouring of support we’ve received since the announcement of the reductions that the impact of this decision will be felt beyond our region. Every branch of national and international cinema will be affected by this structural event. From film buffs who attend festivals in Paris to renowned filmmakers, from technicians to professional networks, the breadth of support we’ve received and the astonishment they’ve voiced is significant. Our Festival is renowned the world over as the cradle of future filmmaking; it places our region at a major pole on the vast map of every branch of the film industry. The Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region claims that it wants to be a major film region, but it is sending mixed signals.

Mr. President, since you were elected as head of the Region, we’ve had several opportunities to tell you about our work, our activities and the way in which they affect our area and our audiences. We hope that this letter will help you understand how important and unstable our situation is, and that of the larger spectrum of purveyors of culture in France today.

Mr. President, we ask you to retract your decision to reduce subsidies for the Clermont-Ferrand Festival this year and agree to engage in substantive dialogue immediately with everyone involved in our region’s cultural activity.

Éric Roux, President,
and the entire team at Sauve qui peut le court métrage