

# An ally in striving for democracy



*Festivities during the launch.*

## Gorée Institute launched in Senegal

The name Gorée might not ring any bells for most South Africans, since our history (as school subject) only reflected what the colonialists and the Nationalists wanted us to read. But to those who have learnt and read about slavery, the name sends chills down the spine.

Gorée Island is notorious for having been the first outpost of the slave trade. The "prison" where local captives were held, and and where, like beasts, their fitness for life was tested, remains on the island as a museum. It remains a very enigmatic symbol of the denial and destruction of a people's

By NDUMI GWAYI

- Promoting the study, acceptance and the practice of democracy in Africa by using strategies in the fields of research, interaction, training and civic education.
- Strengthening the involvement of civic leaders, individuals and organisations based in civil society in particular, in all the programmes of the institute in order to develop a legitimate consensus on what democracy in the African context constitutes.
- Assisting in the effective networking and strengthening of African democrats and

democratic institutions.

- Facilitating the exchange of ideas, experiences, hopes and fears amongst Africans from all sectors and all levels of society, in order to promote South-South dialogue and co-operation as well as to ensure the most effective utilisation of our human

and other resources.

- Contributing towards the generation and rejuvenation of Africa through the promotion and recognition of culture as a critical terrain for innovation, exploration and communication.

André Zaïman, the director of Gorée Institute and a former Idasa regional director in Pretoria, must be commended for the tremendous amount of work he and his team have put in to realise the establishment of the institute. It is also important to note that President Diouf, the Senegalese head of state and only patron of the institute, gave the project his full support, and honour, at the launch.

Giving the keynote address at the launch, Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, who is one of the trustees of Gorée Institute, pointed out that the institute, through President Diouf's support, was fully autonomous and paid no allegiance to any government or organisation. He said the institute was "not interested in promoting prestigious events full of pomp and ceremony" and "endless theorising about democracy, development and culture" but rather in focused workshopping where obstacles to democracy could be identified.

The resonance of drums and the harmonic effect of the kora and other indigenous musical instruments seemed to echo the speeches and the determination of Africa to move to democracy. Before President Diouf gave his message of support, a community theatre group improvised a folk tale which conveyed the message that through perseverance even the tortoise reaches the finishing line. This hopeful note also reverberated in the colourful attire of the locals, especially the women. A range of cultural workers or poets, from Africa and Europe, celebrated the launch.

The current board members are Dr Tunji Abayomi (Nigeria), Prof Heribert Adam (Canada), Mr Breyten Breytenbach, Prof Claude Aké (Nigeria), Prof Theo Hanf (Germany), Mr Charles Mwalimu (Zambia) Mr Ousmane Sembene (Senegal) Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, Mr Hassan Sunmonu (Nigeria) and Mr Albert Tevoedjre (Benin).

The first day of the launch ended with a feast of local music and dance. A seminar on transitions to democracy concluded the launch the following day.

On reflection, I saw the institute as performing the important task of being Africa's ally in striving for democracy, development and international recognition.

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*South Africans on Gorée Island: Jannie Gagiano of Stellenbosch, Shelagh Gastrow and Ndumi Gwayi (both from Idasa).*

humanity through the obliteration of democratic principles.

The launch of Gorée Institute at the end of June therefore, as an institute for democracy and development in Africa, is both symbolically significant and timely. The tide against autocratic rule, it is evident, has engulfed not only the sub-continent of southern Africa but the whole world. One only hopes that the effects of the Cold War which further ravaged Africa as a continent and plunged it into stagnation and dependence will soon be replaced by participatory development and democracy. The institute, will hopefully assist and facilitate this, through its objectives which include: