

## Press Release

The Hague / Dakar, 28 June 2005

Prince Claus Fund for  
Culture and Development

### **The Prince Claus Fund Announces the Sahel Opera's Composers and Artistic Team**

**An international jury has selected four composers for the first Sahel Opera. They are Góo Ba (Senegal), Ze Manel (Guinea Bissau), Tunde Jegede (Nigeria) and Nawal (Comoros), each of whom will compose a different part of the Opera. An artistic team has also been appointed with Wasis Diop (musical director), Oumou Sy (stage sets and costume design), Germaine Acogny (choreography) en Jean-Pierre Leurs (*mise en scène*).**

#### **Composers and artistic team**

This spring, workshops were held for the Sahel Opera at *L'École des Sables* in Toubab Dialaw (Senegal). They took place in the presence of the jury under the chairmanship of Professor Kwabena Nketia, who was a 1997 Prince Claus laureate and is the director of the International Centre of African Music and Dance in Accra (Ghana). It was during these workshops that the jury proposed that these specific composers and the artistic team should be made responsible for the artistic aspects of the opera's production. These recommendations were subsequently adopted by the Board of the Prince Claus Fund.

The composers' musical presentations convinced the international jury of their innovative character and quality. The fact that the music will be written by four composers means that the Opera will combine four diverse styles from the Sahel region. The members of the artistic team worked together for the first time during the workshops.

#### **Prince Claus' idea**

The idea for the Sahel Opera originally came from His Royal Highness Prince Claus of the Netherlands (1926–2002). Prince Claus spent part of his childhood in Tanzania; he later worked on the Ivory Coast and was subsequently employed at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department for Economic Relations with Sub-Saharan Africa. The Prince was extremely interested in African culture and envisaged an opera that would highlight the talents of African musicians and actors.

#### **The Opera's contents**

The Sahel Opera scrutinizes the relation between Europe and Africa in a critical and humorous way. Many people from the Sahel region dream of leaving for Europe. At the same time Europe barges into the Sahel region during the Paris-Dakar Rally, on planes and through the expanding trade and tourism markets. The Sahel Opera will draw attention to these intercultural exchanges.

The Prince Claus Fund is a platform for intercultural exchange. Working with individuals and organisations that are mainly located in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Fund organises activities and publications on contemporary themes in the field of culture and development. The Prince Claus Awards form part of this policy.

Prince Claus Fund  
Hoge Nieuwstraat 30  
2514 EL The Hague  
The Netherlands

tel +31 (0)70.427.4303  
fax +31 (0)70.427.4277  
info@princeclausfund.nl  
www.princeclausfund.nl

**The international jury**

The Prince Claus Fund was responsible for selecting the jury's members. They are: the musician and composer Ray Lema (DR Congo/France); the American theatre-maker Robert Wilson; Pierre Audi, the artistic director of the Netherlands Opera and the author Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana. The jury's chairman is Professor Kwabena Nketia, a Prince Claus laureate and the director of the International Centre of African Music and Dance in Accra (Ghana).

**A 2006 premiere in Mali**

The Opera's world premiere is planned for Bamako (Mali) during the celebrations of the Fund's tenth anniversary in 2006. Cheikh Oumar Sissoko, the Malian Minister for Culture has promised his full co-operation, and the Republic of Mali is one of the Opera's co-producers. The Sahel Opera underlines the importance that the Prince Claus Fund attaches to the scouting of artistic talent, the supporting of a cultural infrastructure in the region and the provision of an international platform for unknown talent.

**Casting**

The casting of the actors, singers and dancers is scheduled to take place in the Sahel region in November. A team will be put together that will consist of a total of 80 artists and musicians. Next year's rehearsals will be preceded by training sessions for the dancers, singers, musicians and technicians.

The Dutch National Postal Code Lottery is supporting the Sahel Opera with a contribution of € 1,500,000.

To co-ordinate the Sahel Opera's production, the Prince Claus Fund is working with Metissacana, the cultural organisation that was set up by Oumou Sy and Michel Mavros in Dakar.

For further information:

The Prince Claus Fund  
Christine Wagner, press & publicity  
Hoge Nieuwstraat 30, 2514 EL The Hague  
The Netherlands  
tel +31 70.427.4303 or  
c.wagner@princeclausfund.nl  
www.sahelopera.com  
www.princeclausfund.nl

Metissacana: Michel Mavros  
tel +221 69.32.699 / +221 58.52.698  
metissacana@mestissacana.sn