

## History of the African Studies Centre, Leiden

The Afrika-Instituut, as it was originally known, was founded on 12 August 1947. It consisted of a scientific documentation centre in Leiden and a trade office in Rotterdam, which later moved to The Hague and changed its name to the Netherlands-African Business Council (NABC). The African Studies Centre (ASC) was officially inaugurated as a scientific institute on 28 August 1958 and has developed into a vibrant centre focusing on research and documentation. The scientific quality and societal relevance of its independent research are important and the ASC's extensive library, with 80,000 books and 2,000 journals, is developing its digital collection and focusing on providing open access to scientific information.

In its early years, the Board of Governors was made up of business people (such as the Rotterdam banker Van der Mandele) and scientists (like Prof. F.M. Baron van Asbeck).



K.P. van der Mandele



F.M. Baron van Asbeck

Many well-known Africanists have worked at the African Studies Centre over the years, including the poet Vernie February, the activist Klaas de Jonge, the sociologist Robert Buijtenhuijs and the film director Emile van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal. Former director Stephen Ellis used to be editor-in-chief of *Africa Confidential* and Kofi Abrefa Busia, who later became Prime Minister of Ghana, worked at the Centre from 1960 to 1962. Over the years, many researchers from Africa have found their way to Leiden, either as speakers at conferences and seminars or as visiting fellows.



Klaas de Jonge under 'house arrest' at the Netherlands Embassy in South Africa (1986)

Willie Tan, Vernie February & Simon Vinkenoog (1981)

Kofi Busia, Professor in Leiden 1960-1962 and later Prime Minister of Ghana

The African Studies Centre has had various addresses in Leiden over the years – Rapenburg 45 (Telders' house, where Queen Beatrix lived when she was a student at Leiden University), Rapenburg 8 and Stationsplein 10 – and it has been housed at Wassenaarseweg 52 since 1989.



Rapenburg 45 in Leiden, the home of the ASC in its early years

Wassenaarseweg 52, Leiden, where the ASC has had its offices since 1989

The past directors of the ASC were Prof. P.J. Idenburg, Prof. J.F. Holleman, G.W. Grootenhuis, Prof Stephen. Ellis, Prof Gerti Hesseling and Prof. Leo de Haan. Prof. Ton Dietz is the current director.



Prof. P.J. Idenburg, one of the founding fathers and the ASC's first director

Stephen Ellis, ASC director 1991-1994

Chief Koussanar (Senegal) and Gerti Hesseling, ASC director 1996-2004

The African Studies Centre receives its core funding from the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, via Leiden University. Other funding comes from scientific grants (NWO, WOTRO, KNAW), NGOs, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and various commercial partners.

The ASC was one of the founders of AEGIS, the network of African Studies Centres in Europe that was set up in 1991 to build on the resources and research potential available within Africanist institutions in Europe. The 2<sup>nd</sup> European Conference on African Studies was organized by the ASC in Leiden in 2007. Since 2005 the ASC has a strategic partnership with Codesria (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) in Dakar (Senegal).



For more information, see Max de Bok: *Leer mij Afrika kennen: vijftig jaar Afrika-Studiecentrum* (Leiden, 2000). ISBN 90-5448-040-8

For free online access to this jubilee book: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/18449>