

Idasa office to close

THE East London office of Idasa will close on September 30 as part of a restructuring initiative.

The decision was taken at a recent board meeting so as to ensure that Idasa remains as well positioned and as adequately resourced as possible to be effective in the transition.

Executive director Alex Boraine said the decision was taken with regret. However, Idasa was not untouched by the dynamic situation in the country. "The election of a government of national unity, together with new regional and local government structures, will convulse South African society and impact on all organisations."

A number of other decisions were taken regarding the structure and strategy of Idasa – particularly in anticipation of changes to regional boundaries in the Eastern Cape. These include the need to review the work of the Port Elizabeth office in order to reach a conclusive decision about the impact of the institute in that region.

"Inevitably the process of restructuring and rationalisation will continue over the next few months and into the future," said Boraine. "Our aim is to be better equipped and to make strategic use of available resources."

Letters

Balance appreciated

I WOULD like to take the opportunity to congratulate you for the outstanding work your organisation renders in these most trying times in South Africa.

I appreciate the balanced nature of your reporting, giving the subject matter dealt with the analysis needed to contribute towards creating reasonable solutions. Keep up the good work.

A B Ally,
Marl, Germany

Distorted picture of Africa

Reports that characterise Africa as a continent of disasters are unfair and even racist, says COLIN LEGUM, London-based editor of *Third World Reports*, in a letter to the *London Times* reprinted here.

IT is especially sad when your respected correspondent, Sam Kiley, contributes to the damaging distortion of events in Africa ("Eritrean litany of African failures stuns leaders", 29 June 1993).

He lists all the tragic conflicts in the continent – in fact, six out of 52 countries – as though this were the general condition of Africa, and then writes that Botswana, Namibia and Benin are the only countries where democracy and economic development have been achieved. He ignores the country with the best record – Mauritius – as well as progress that has been made in Ghana and Seychelles. Nor does he mention The Gambia, which has maintained a democratic parliamentary system since its independence over 30 years ago.

Granting that economic development in Africa has remained a shocking disappointment, it should be remembered that this has been patchy rather than general, and that until the onset of the international economic "recession" and three years of the worst drought this century, the IMF was able to report that economic recovery had begun.

However, as the Organisation of African Unity (as well as "the West") recognises, the precondi-

tion for sustained economic growth is democratic and accountable government; it is in this area that the continent's progress has been remarkable (and remarkably under-reported) in the last few years.

A balanced picture requires that the calamities in Africa should be set off against the advances that are being made. Already, multi-party democratic elections have overturned four previous regimes (Zambia, Madagascar, Cape Verde, and Sao Tome and Principe). Similar elections, internationally monitored, have ensured the return of the governments of Seychelles, Guinea Bissau and Kenya – the latter admittedly a flawed election. Military and single-party regimes have been replaced in the Congo and Lesotho. Negotiations for multi-party democratic parliaments are well advanced in Niger, Mali and Chad. Tanzania will shortly hold multi-party elections.

The current crises in Nigeria, Zaire, Togo and Malawi are about the ending of military and single-party rule.

In the conflict-ridden Horn of Africa, we have seen the emergence of the democratic independent republic of Eritrea and the ending of revolutionary war

in Ethiopia, where a remarkable effort to negotiate the framework of a democratic federation is being made.

Finally, there is the heartening development in Burundi where, after peaceful elections, the Hutu majority have won power from a Tutsi elite, ending one of the nastiest ethnic conflicts in the continent. In neighbouring Rwanda there are promising signs of a similar reconciliation between the Hutu and Tutsi. And in Mozambique the nasty war in which Renamo engaged has ended and elections for a democratic parliament are about to take place under international supervision.

To crown all these developments, South Africa has abandoned apartheid and, despite predictable setbacks, is on its way to holding the first democratic elections in its history.

In the light of these developments who can be pessimistic about the hopes for Africa's recovery? It will take time for democracy to strike deep roots and for sustained economic growth to take place: but in the name of fairness it is time to stop treating Africa as a continent of disasters. To me, this smacks of conscious or unconscious racism.

Nasty to Durban

I HAVE received my copy of *Democracy in Action* for years with enthusiasm because I believe in the aims of Idasa – articles in *Democracy in Action* have so often helped me to put a point of view across.

Imagine my horror to read the nasty damaging report in Ja-Nee of the Amateur African Athletic Championships in Durban. The event was a great success to the point that the organisers were urged by the AAAC president and officials to make a bid for the World Athletic Championships with their promised support for Durban.

Now to the added insult of biased and ill

informed scribes – Durban does not have a "mayoress". A woman mayor, yes. I suggest a shift away from such sexist thinking!

Yes, I had to miss the opening because of another commitment, but let's face it most sporting bodies lack experience in organising international events and what they have learned will stand us in good stead for future events.

Surely, what we are hoping to achieve in South Africa is a united country, not a continuation of nasty side wipes whenever a possible weakness is spotted.

Ms M E Winter
Mayor, Durban

(Sorry about the mayoress – editor)