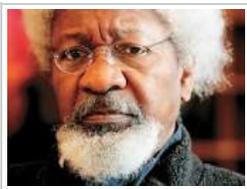


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ARTS AND CULTURE: WOLE SOYINKA TO HEADLINE STORYMOJA FESTIVAL 2014



One of Africa's premier literary festivals is set for next week. In its six years of existence, the Storymoja Festival has managed to grow from a small gathering of literature lovers and authors to one of the most important gatherings of writers, poets, artists, activists, storytellers and thinkers on the African continent. This year, the Festival brings together some of the greatest thinkers in Africa, including the celebrated and renowned Nobel Laureate, playwright, essayist and novelist Wole Soyinka and the poet, editor, critic, and musician Kwame Dawes.

The two will be among over 170 artists from 16 countries who will check in to Kenya's capital for the Festival that will be held from the 17th to the 21st of September at the Nairobi National Museum. Other artists include Teju Cole – author of the award winning novel "Open City" and the phenomenal Twitter sensation #SmallFates, Nii Ayikwei Parkes -Ghanaian author of "Tail of the Blue Bird", Clifton Gachagua – Kenyan poet and "Madman of Kilifi" author, Joan Ball Burgess- from Bermuda, author of 'The Lizard and the Rock', Alexander Nderitu – Kenyan novelist, poet and scriptwriter – author of "When the Whirlwind Passes", Hussein Kurji-filmmaker, Salim Keshavjee-Filmmaker, Boniface Mwangi- Kenyan Photographer and activist. This year's programme includes a wide array of performances, debates, master classes, film screenings, exhibitions, book launches, concerts and provocative discussions.

A year after its previous edition was cancelled due to terror attacks at a nearby shopping mall, the Storymoja Festival 2014 promises to be more engaging than ever before. "This year is particularly special as it represents the first anniversary of the Westgate terror attack where Professor Kofi Awoonor was among those who lost their lives," says Festival Producer Dawn Makena. Kwame Dawes will be delivering the Awoonor Memorial Lecture to celebrate the life, talent and work of the late Professor Awoonor.

After the Storymoja Hay Festival 2011, Booker Prize winning Nigerian novelist & Poet Ben Okri said: "It's almost a magical experience to be here. One of the values of art is that it enables us to see each other more clearly." At a time when Africa is bedevilled with the Ebola epidemic and numerous terror attacks, festivals such as the Storymoja Festival 2014 provide the perfect opportunity to recapture the African spirit. As a celebration of literature, culture and communication, the Festival is just the place to drive conversations about the state of society and how Africans celebrate each other. As the late Professor Kofi Awoonor said the day before his death, "It is important for Africans to teach Africans."

The Storymoja Festival began as a small festival called the Nyama Choma Festival before it partnered with the famous Hay Festival. It ran under the combined name, the Storymoja Hay Festival, for a few years before finally going on its own. As Muthoni Garland, one of the Festival founders, said at a recent media launch: "Our partnership with the Hay Festival was our growth point. It provided us with funding and the clout to make this festival what it is today. But from this year, the Festival is no longer a part of the Hay Festivals." Auma Obama, this year's Festival Patron, reiterated the commitment of the literary event to promote reading and learning among African children.

This year's edition is expected to attract a crowd of almost 10,000 over its five days of events.

Written by Morris Kiruga

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