



**Michael Bula, Honorary
Consul-General of Senegal,
Consulate General of the
Republic of Senegal**

Michael Bula has a confession: 20 years ago, after finishing his law degree at the University of Melbourne, he applied to Australia's civil service to be a diplomat. He missed out by "one point", and has suffered "a slight twinge of regret" ever since.

But Bula has ended up being a diplomat of sorts, although not for Australia. Instead, in 2003, he was appointed honorary consul-general for the small and resource-rich West African nation of Senegal. As with many honorary consuls, Bula is not a national of Senegal. He grew up in "leafy Camberwell and Canterbury", an area he describes as a "hothouse for international yearnings".

Bula, 47, a lawyer specialising in mining and international law, runs the consulate alongside his own business in Carlton.

The number of Senegalese in this city is relatively small – perhaps 200, says Bula – but the country's government is expanding relationships with Australian mining companies, mostly dealing in gold, mineral sands (such as zircon), bauxite and iron ore.

Bula is a fluent French-speaker and a passionate Francophile (he also works as a legal adviser to the French diplomatic and consulate posts in Australia). French is Senegal's main language.

Bula, one suspects, does nothing by halves. He met his wife of 15 years, Maggie, just prior to his first marriage to someone else. Maggie was then secretary to the French Consul-General – like Bula, she is also fluent in French. Shortly after meeting Bula, she returned to live and work in France.

On her return to Australia several years later, Michael was again single and says they have hardly been apart since. (Both are directors of her Corporate Language Communications company.) Their two girls, aged eight and four, are bilingual. Bula speaks to them only in French.

The Honorary Consul-General of Senegal has yet another hat: Bula is a thespian, founder of the Melbourne French Theatre company, which regularly puts on French plays at venues in Fitzroy.

How does he do it? "It's a matter of being organised," he says. "It's the only way." And one must "intensely love the country you represent". But Bula is also upfront about the advantages of such a position. "There is an intelligence in terms of your own professional activities, you get referred all kinds of work. It helps to solidify your professional position."

He acknowledges the support of Maggie: "You need the support of your spouse, but you also want to share this life with them – because it's an interesting one." →