



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA

Speech by Australia's Acting High Commissioner

Mr Chris Munn

Monday 26 January 2015

AUSTRALIA DAY 2015

- *Office bearers and members of the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce for Southern Africa*
- *Members of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation*
- *Members of the Australian High Commission in Pretoria and the Australian Trade Commission in Johannesburg*
- *Other distinguished guests*

I would like to welcome you here this evening to wish you a very Happy Australia Day 2015 and to thank you for your continuing interest in the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce for Southern Africa (which officially turns one today).

We celebrate Australia Day annually on 26 January marking the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet of British ships in 1788. Today Australia Day is a day for celebrating our rich history, starting with the first Australians - our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – our diversity, our values and the proud nation we have become.

Most Australians use Australia Day to celebrate being Australian and to enjoy another day off, a month after Christmas, with barbecues and picnics, playing sport or attending big sporting events and for some, formal ceremonies to mark the voluntary take-up of Australian citizenship. In the year 2013-14, over 163,000 people became Australian citizens, adding to the 4.5 million people who have become citizens since Australian citizenship was introduced in 1949. It is estimated that at 20 January 2015, Australia's population was approximately 23 million 716 thousand.

Talking of major sporting events – Australia will play the UAE tomorrow in Newcastle in the second semi-final of the Asian Cup. It has been a great performance by the Socceroos so far and it would be great for them to get into the final with

As many of you know, the Cricket World Cup, being hosted in Australia and New Zealand starts on 13 February. Like all World Cups before it, this one is expected to be closely fought and an amazing feast of one day cricket.

Let me veer from the topic of upcoming sporting events.

As Australians, we have much to be thankful for and much to be proud of. This speech is far too short to list those Australian achievements but I would like to mention one achievement, which I think highlighted 2014 for me. Last year was a difficult year and tested many people.

For our South African and non-Australian friends in the audience this evening, the events in Martin Place in the centre of Sydney on 15 to 16 December, marked the first time that many Australians in Australia felt personally threatened or touched by terrorism linked to ISIS. Two brave people lost their lives as a result of that siege and sixteen survived. What made many people proud to be Australian during the siege was the remarkable response to a few ugly racist urges to blame the incident on Islam and Australian Muslims. Rather than spiral into a frenzy of xenophobia and ugliness, over 115,000 Australians reached out to their unknown frightened Muslim neighbours and colleagues through twitter, in the first 12 hours and pledged “I’ll ride with you” to protect them from threats (especially on public transport), as a result of their being identifiably Muslim.

There is of course another closer reason to be proud tonight.

Tonight marks the first anniversary of the announcement by Graeme Wilson and Susan Shabangu of the formation of the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce for Southern Africa. Many of you have signed up as members of the ABCSA in this first year and the office bearers have given us a wonderful year of events.

I would like to thank Michael Templeton, Charles Deacon, Danielle Magidson, John Madew, Shane Hunter and Genevieve Hunter for their efforts as office bearers and for all of you here who are not yet members but considering membership, please sign up tonight or at the very least take home the membership forms. We want you to add to the high quality of the existing membership and to increase the organisation’s diversity and strength. Michael and his team of office bearers can be proud of their achievements in just one year. The ABCSA has been physically established and formalised. They have nurtured growth this year in ABCSA’s membership to around 50 companies, with many more companies expressing an interest. The Committee has also quickly got done to business to put together a very successful events and meetings program for its members. In addition and what separates a good from a great foreign business chamber is the amount thought and the efforts to identify and encourage partners and other stakeholders to work with and advocate for the ABCSA to achieve real outcomes.

At this point I would like to give a plug to the Oceania Directorate of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation. 2014 was a busy year bilaterally and we thank you for getting on board the bus to strengthen, improve and grow our bilateral relationship. To Betsie Smith, Annelize Schroeder and Mia Wilken – thank you and on behalf of the ABCSA – thank you for your sincere interest in the ABCSA.

The Australian and Southern African governments need to hear from you, the representatives of our business community, on what governments can and in some case need to do to help you. As well, we, the representatives of the Australian Government in southern Africa want to work together with the Australian commercial sector (and all that entails) to promote Australian economic diplomacy in this region.

For those of you who will be attending Mining Indaba in Cape Town in February – good luck. We will have our Australian Government representatives there and will be seeking to promote Australian mining and mining service interests in Africa to the various government and commercial representatives in attendance.

For those of you in other sectors, please stay in touch with the ABCSA, with Austrade and with the High Commission so, as I said earlier, we can work with you all in order to promote all Australia's commercial and economic interests in southern Africa.

Finally, before I conclude, I would like to thank Michael Templeton and his excellent team once more for their achievements this year. I wish ABCSA a successful 2015 with further membership growth and mutually-beneficial stakeholder engagement leading to a stronger Australian economic and commercial presence in southern Africa and to encourage southern Africa to look more to Australia when considering import and investment sources.

To all of you here, thank you for your attendance tonight. Please, as the ABCSA enters its second year, continue your active participation and support of this wonderful organisation to ensure that it continues to deliver an appropriate, high-quality and focussed package to its members.

Happy Australia Day and Happy Birthday ABCSA