



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION SOUTH AFRICA

Presentation by Australia's High Commissioner to Botswana
H.E. Mr Graeme Wilson

Opening Ceremony
Kasane Primary School Peace Centre
Chobe, Botswana

Thursday 19 June 2014

Salutation

- Mr Keletso J. Rakhudu, Honourable Assistant Minister of Education and Skills Development and Member of Parliament for Gaborone North
- Mr Gibson Nshimwe, Honourable Member of Parliament for Chobe Constituency
- Mr Moffat Mwezi, Court President Kasane Customary Court
- Mr Shababa Munihango, Honourable Councillor for Kasane Central
- Mr Kamwi Samunzala, Honourable Councillor for Plateau
- Mr Nelson Masule, Honourable Landboard Chairman
- Mr Leon Kempler, Chair of Ducere Foundation
- Ms Matshidiso Masire, Executive Director of Sir Ketumile Masire Foundation
- Mrs Di Fleming, Executive Director of Ducere Foundation
- Mr Sonny Mooketse, Director Regional Operations
- Ms Lydia Mwezi, Head of Kasane Primary School
- Other distinguished guests
- Teachers, Parents, Ladies and Gentlemen

- Children of Kasane Primary – the real stars of today’s event.

It is wonderful to be here at Kasane Primary School and to see so many bright, smiling faces. Thank you for such a warm welcome and moving rendition of the Australian National Anthem.

When I was last here in Chobe, I was celebrating a very special birthday with my wife. I didn’t know you all then; otherwise I would have invited you to my party!

I am located in Pretoria as Australia’s High Commissioner to South Africa but I am also accredited to six other countries, including Botswana. And I love coming to Botswana because it is such a beautiful and friendly country. Australia and Botswana enjoy close and constructive relations. We also share the same values of respect for peace, democracy and human rights.

When I was your age, I wanted to be a teacher because I loved school and thought – as I still do – that education was the pathway to a bright future. I did eventually become a teacher for a few years before starting my diplomatic career. As with education, diplomacy is about learning and listening, and building healthy, respectful and peaceful relations between people and countries.

It is therefore a particular pleasure to be with you this morning to formally open the Ducere Peace Centre here at Kasane Primary School.

Less than twelve months ago, the Australian High Commission received an application from the Ducere Foundation, supported by the Sir Ketumile Masire Foundation, requesting funding for the construction of two Peace Centres under our Direct Aid Program. We were happy to support the application because we wanted to show our commitment to you, the future leaders of Botswana.

The Australian Government sees value in partnering with organisations such as Ducere because we support its fundamental philosophy.

Ducere’s vision of developing passionate and motivated leaders is an excellent match to Australia’s policy of creating opportunity rather than simply providing aid hand-outs.

Aid is a bridge; it is a beginning where support can ignite creativity and imagination, and today we see the results of the funding.

I know that Ms Matshidiso Masire, through her work as Executive Director of the Sir Ketumile Masire Foundation (SKMF), is also committed to peace and good governance.

Through the SKMF Youth programs, young people are taught to manage their creative ideas and to take on leadership roles.

I am sure the Head of School, Mrs Mwezi, will encourage students to stand in this Centre at assembly and share their ideas and how they will put those ideas into practice. As the famous Botswana proverb tells us: 'Only a lion knows best its own needs and can best serve them.'

In today's world, I encourage every student to be a proud, determined lion and to draw on your imagination to best create and serve.

The Peace Initiative

I am sure that most parents, teachers and elders here today would agree that peace begins in our own homes.

If we respect each other and listen to each other - adults and children equally - then that listening will lead to harmony, respect and increased understanding. Peace is essential within families, classrooms, across the school ground, across tribes and between nations.

We live in a world where there are groups of people who try to dominate others by pushing their own ideas. They ignore the opinion of others and, when they cannot get their way, use force.

Force leads to fighting, to wars and to the end of lives, the end of families - instead of peace and harmony, we end up with anger, rage and revenge.

For the entire world, peace is imperative because it delivers the opportunity to relate with others with understanding, good will and cooperation.

Peace helps to define values, form attitudes and behaviours that reflect respect for life, dignity and human rights, and the rejection of violence.

Violent disputes have no room to develop if the space is occupied by peaceful intentions.

It is with this understanding that the Australian Government supports the Ducere Peace Education initiative that provides a place for children to engage in genuine dialogue and to become advocates for positive change.

As we drove into the school today and I saw the Peace Centre for the first time, I was moved by the beauty and power of this inspiring structure.

I appreciate that the Peace Centres are built on the ancient tradition of the Kgotla, one of the oldest democratic traditions in the world, with a history dating back over 3000 years.

Similar designs can be seen across Botswana and it is a reminder of the reputation that Botswana has as a peaceful, stable and safe country where democratic ideals are central to decision making. It is one of the reasons that Botswana and Australia have such a close and friendly relationship. The values we share underpin our growing commercial and investment relationship as well as Australia's commitment to the future of Botswana through our scholarships program.

The Peace Program here in Kasane is not just about the creation of a physical space and stage. Beyond its actual construction, the Peace Centre provides the foundations for peace, a unique educational environment and a house for the work of the student Peace Clubs.

Debating is already strong within the Peace Clubs and I imagine in the weeks and years to come that students will continue to work within the Peace Centre to debate, research and form opinions around topics such as:

- Is science the answer to the mysteries of the universe?
- Is education the key to Botswana's future and the economic development of Africa?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Dūcere foundation and the Sir Ketumile Masire Foundation should be proud of the contribution they have made to improve education experiences and outcomes for thousands of young Batswana.

My daughter Laura, who is visiting from Australia and is with me today, is studying law and languages at the Australia National University in Canberra, Australia. By focusing on international law courses, she has developed an appreciation of the need for peaceful conflict resolution, while her language studies have highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and clear communication.

In addition, Laura has worked part time at libraries in Canberra where her responsibilities have included reading stories to young children. This brought home to her the power of literacy and storytelling.

The Dūcere Publishing initiative is also very powerful. The vision to distribute one million books and to publish African Children's stories written by African children across this huge continent must be applauded.

Dūcere Publishing program is allowing the preservation of oral traditions in local communities by encouraging children to capture the stories their grandparents were told - this is a wonderful project.

Dūcere publishing enables the creativity and imagination of African children to flourish.

In conclusion

I am reminded of the African Proverb that is illustrated boldly on the wall at the Johannesburg International Airport Departure Lounge:

If you want to go fast, go alone,
If you want to go far, go together.

Today, the wisdom of that proverb is seen all around us. There is an African word: Umoja – it means togetherness. This Peace Centre

reflects Umoja: bringing together Australia and Botswana, the school and its vibrant community, the builders, the dreamers and the children as they set out on their journey to become respected future leaders of this great country.

I am truly honoured to participate in this very special occasion. It is a source of pleasure and pride for Australia to be part of such a wonderful initiative and for me to be with you today. Together, I think we make a great team. I hope that when we meet up again in the future, you will be telling me your stories about the contribution you have made to building an even more prosperous and peaceful Botswana.

Thank you.