



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

**Remarks by Australian High Commissioner, HE Mr Graeme Wilson
at the Australia Awards Alumni Conference
Cape Town, Monday 9 September 2013**

Distinguished guests from Australia and Africa

The real stars of the show – our Alumni

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to be here on this very important occasion and to see a number of old friends as well as the smiling and intelligent faces of what I think is an excellent cross-section of the future of Africa right here before me.

I am honoured to be addressing you today and I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all to the first Australia Awards Alumni Conference to take place in Africa. Being such a multitalented and multilingual group, and in deference to our francophone alumni, je voudrais juste dire que c'est un plaisir pour moi d'être avec vous aujourd'hui et de vous accueillir à cette conférence de grande importance. Bienvenue à toutes et à tous

This special gathering brings together 120 Australian Awards Alumni from over 30 African nations to share ideas and best practice on initiatives that aim to contribute to Africa's development.

We are also thrilled to have a number of distinguished guest speakers from Africa and Australia who have kindly agreed to participate in this conference, and who I am sure will make an invaluable contribution to our deliberations. Over the course of the next two and a half days, we will celebrate the enhanced partnerships between Australia and Africa which have been made possible through Australia Awards.

I would like to start by saying a few words, though, about the broader context of Australia's commitment to Africa. Over the past 5 or 6 years, the Australian Government has significantly increased its

engagement with Africa and we now have diplomatic relations with all 54 African countries

- We have enhanced our diplomatic network, including through opening a new mission in Addis Ababa, the seat of the African Union.
- There has been a range of high-level visits in both directions in recent years, including at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth in 2011, as well as high-level contact at African Union summits and in the margins of UN meetings. In March this year, I accompanied the President of Mozambique and his delegation on a Guest of Government visit to Australia.
- Australia is currently serving a 2-year term on the UN Security Council. We are very grateful for the great support we received from Africa for our candidacy. Our term on the Security Council presents a range of new opportunities for dialogue and strengthened engagement in relation to peace and security issues, especially given that approximately 70 percent of the Security Council's agenda is related to Africa.

Australians know Africa's future holds great promise and this is reflected in the continuing growth of Australian trade and investment in African countries, particularly in the mineral resources and education sectors.

Our trade with Africa has grown by about 6% annually over the past decade. Investment by Australian companies in Africa's resources sector is increasing, with some 40% of all Australian overseas mining projects being in Africa.

There are now more than 200 Australian companies with over 700 projects spread across some 40 countries in Africa. Our commercial engagement in Africa is not limited to the resources sector. Australian agriculture, education, water management and infrastructure companies are also involved and are implementing projects in these sectors which are crucial for Africa's development.

Our people-to-people links - through sport, education, business and culture - are very strong, with Australians and Africans travelling between our two continents every day.

- Australian author, Damien Brown, who was born in Cape Town, has written a book called 'Bandaid for a Broken Leg' about his experiences of working with Médecins Sans Frontières in Africa. Damien is participating in the Open Book Literary Festival here in Cape Town this week

In addition to these people-to-people links, Australia's development cooperation program in Africa has also grown significantly over the past few years, and our presence here today is a direct reflection of

that. Capacity building has been a key component of that growth, with Australia Awards, the flagship of our aid program. As some of you know, the Australian government has offered scholarships to Africa since the 1960s. I am pleased to say that we now have more than 5000 Africans who have been trained through programs funded through Australia's development cooperation program and today they form base of an active alumnus of which you are part.

- In 2012 alone, Australia offered more than 1000 training opportunities to 50 countries in Africa through Australia Awards.

Australia appreciates that a nation's future is built on the capacity of its institutions and people. Lessons from many parts of the world show that the creation of a skilled work force and influencing individual behaviours, values and attitudes through education significantly improves the prospects for economic growth, good governance, social cohesion and democratic reforms in any country.

In helping to build African capacity, Australia draws on its excellent education and research institutions, best practice public sector institutions, extensive experience in developing and managing natural resources, agricultural expertise and other areas of common interest with African nations.

As part of our engagement with Africa, we have been keen to promote the foundations for sustainable and equitable economic growth, reform and good governance.

You – the Australian Alumni – play a key role in this engagement by helping foster diverse and personal links between Australia and Africa.

Our Alumni are the essence of what we do via the Australia Awards. It is through specialised knowledge and skills, leadership and enthusiasm that our Alumni (both those present in the room today and others elsewhere in Africa) are bringing about positive change and contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals across the continent.

However, transfer of knowledge is not a one way process and we Australians are also very keen to learn from you. We are equally keen to remain connected to our Alumni in Africa and one way we do this through organising forums such as this one.

In the course of this conference, we look forward to hearing and learning more from you about the various activities and initiatives that you are working on and that are impacting on the lives of your country men and women.

Please stay connected and continue to keep us informed of your work and your accomplishments.

We are very proud of you, our Alumni. We will always regard you as friends and we will always be interested in what you are doing and how you are making a difference.

Best wishes for the conference and for the work you are doing in your home countries. I look forward to catching up with as many of you as I can and hearing about the ideas, outcomes and friendships generated through this important conference.