



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION SOUTH AFRICA

Remarks by Acting High Commissioner, Mr Peter Budd Opening of Conference on “Closing the Gap in Education: Improving Outcomes in Southern World Societies” 25-27 November 2009 Monash South Africa, Johannesburg

Thank you.

It gives me great pleasure to open Monash South Africa’s third conference here at their campus in South Africa with the focus of this conference on the very important issue of education.

I’d like to convey the apologies of the Australian High Commissioner, HE Ann Harrap, who is unable to be with us today.

Australia’s strengthened engagement with Africa

The topic of the conference is very pertinent to me as a current Australian Government representative in Africa.

This is because the Australian Government is committed to strengthening its engagement with the countries, institutions and peoples of Africa, and education is at the heart of this strengthened engagement.

This is a deliberate shift in policy and it starts from the understanding that, in the words of the Australian Foreign Minister, that “[i]n the past, Australia has not given Africa the priority it requires and deserves.” There was a sense that Government had lagged behind our growing trade and investment and people-to-people links.

And a sense that, given this Government’s strong commitment to multilateralism, Africa’s 53 countries and the continent will have an increasingly important global role and so we need to engage more with Africa.

And Australia also thinks it important that we make a contribution to accelerate Africa’s progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. To achieve this, the Government is committed to increasing our development

assistance to Africa, and in the last year alone increased our program by 40 per cent.

Education – a principal area of focus for our development assistance to Africa

In this context of strengthened engagement with Africa, education, in particular capacity building through tertiary education, will be one of the principal areas of focus of Australia's growing development assistance program to Africa.

Australia recognises that many countries in Africa face serious skills challenges and addressing these human resource capacity constraints will be crucial to Africa's future.

In this context, Australia is certainly trying to do its bit. Australia has provided more than 3,600 tertiary scholarships to Africa since 1960.

And while at the African Union summit in Addis Ababa earlier this year, the Australian Foreign Minister announced that Australia would increase by 10-fold the number of scholarships it offers to African students - from 100 each year last year, to 1000 each year by 2012-2013.

And so as to effectively respond to the needs of African countries – those scholarships will be a combination of both longer-term post-graduate scholarships as well as shorter term awards and work placements.

This echoes the broader focus that Australia places on education through its development assistance program. Education is identified as a flagship sector of Australia's growing aid program. Education is accorded this level of priority because it is one of the highest impact development investments with far-reaching social returns.

Education (including scholarships) will shortly become the aid program's largest sector. It will be worth more than A\$690 million in 2009-10, or approximately 18% of our total Overseas Development Assistance. This is an increase of 29% from the previous year.

Australian Education Excellence

Australia is an emerging international leader in education and a destination of choice for many international students seeking a high quality education. We welcome tens of thousands of students from more than 190 countries every year.

Australia is committed to providing a high-quality education experience for all – our universities are world class. And Australia seeks to provide international students with the support they need while studying in the land 'down under'.

These international students make an enormous contribution to Australia's multicultural diversity, the academic life of our institutions and contribute to stronger people-to-people linkages across the world.

Amongst these, thousands of private African students choose Australia as their tertiary education destination. There are around 9000 students from all over Africa each year that study in Australia.

And in the case of many countries in Africa, students have been at the heart of the growing links between Australia and Africa. And one of the leading institutions in this regard is of course Monash University.

We have been very pleased to work closely with Monash South Africa in this year's and last year's conference, as well as during the visit to South Africa this week of the 2009 Australian of the Year, Professor Mick Dodson. It is important in this regard to credit the significant role that Monash South Africa, supported by the university in Australia, is already playing in Africa to build skills capacity.

1-Goal for All

But it is not only in tertiary education that Australia is making a contribution. Australia's support to education extends from basic education to technical and vocational skills training and tertiary education.

An example of this was the Australian Government support through our small grants scheme projects for a handover yesterday of some 1700 lapdesks to children at a nearby school with which Monash South Africa also works.

This support includes a strong focus on the MDGs and Education for All (EFA) goals to enable all children – boys and girls – to have access to a quality education.

The Australian government is proud to support the 1 Goal Campaign – this exciting campaign that uses the World Cup to give all kids, especially girls, a chance to go to school.

Many of us personally know the power of education in helping to change lives and to give individuals the chance to achieve their potential. And we recognize the power of football 'on and off the field' to give all children a better chance at life.

With the world's eyes turning to the World Cup in South Africa, now is the time to take the opportunity to make the lasting legacy of the World Cup education for all children around the world particularly girls.

With other world leaders and soccer players, the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd pledged Australia's support for the "1GOAL Education For All" campaign during the global launch in the UK and Europe, along with President Zuma and the captain of South Africa's football team- Aaron Mokoena.

As you may know, earlier this year in June, the Australian Socceroos qualified for the 2010 FIFA World Cup with a win over Qatar. We look forward to seeing them play here next year.

I'd like to encourage you all to register your support on the 1 Goal website - Join1GOAL.org - and get behind the Socceroos at the World Cup in South Africa

So to conclude, I would like now to broadcast message from the Australian Prime Minister about the 1-GOAL education for all campaign.

Thank you.