



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

**Remarks by Australian High Commissioner to South Africa
HE Mr Graeme Wilson
Opening Dinner to AAUN Pretoria Workshop, 4 April 2014**

Professor Cheryl de la Rey, Co-Chair of the Australia Africa Universities Network and Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria

Professor John Hearn, Co-Chair of AAUN and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International) at the University of Sydney

Distinguished guests from the academic and government sectors in Africa and Australia

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is wonderful to be standing in front of such a venerable and diverse group of enquiring minds and action-oriented leaders united as one in wanting to take forward the already strong bonds of friendship and cooperation between Australia and Africa, both at the individual and institutional levels.

I am very impressed by the presence of a number of South African academics and officials, especially with South Africa being locked in a titanic battle with India for a place in the T20 World Cup Final!

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the Australia Africa Universities Network International Africa forum for 2014. I would particularly like to thank our co-Chairs, that dynamic duo, Vice Chancellor Professor Cheryl de la Rey and Professor John Hearn for the kind invitation. I would also like to recognise their excellent work in being the driving forces behind the network and the resultant relationships that have been developed between Australian and African universities.

I am sure we all agree that their combined efforts have, in a remarkably short period of time, guided the AAUN into becoming an important and innovative platform for furthering Australia-Africa education and research partnerships. I know that their work is supported by many others across our two continents and I applaud the work done by all members of the Network.

Tonight, I will take the opportunity to provide you with a brief update on Australia's relations with Africa, which I hope will contribute to your deliberations.

I think this update will confirm the value of AAUN's objective of *revitalising Australia's relationship with Africa through collaboration in research and education*. It will also confirm the alignment of the majority of AAUN's focus themes - Food Security; Mining and minerals; Public sector reform; Public health; and Education - with the Australian Government's engagement in Africa.

Pillars of relationship with Africa under the new Government

Since I spoke at the last AAUN function here at the University of Pretoria in September 2013, there has been a changing of the political guard in Australia. The new Government in Australia remains committed to furthering Australia's relationships with African countries, with an increased focus on the Indian Ocean rim and eastern and southern Africa.

Australia's business and investment links with Africa continue to grow despite the difficult global economic conditions in recent years. The importance of Australia's resources sector interests in Africa is highlighted by the fact that more than 200 ASX-listed mining and resources companies are operating more than 700 projects across Africa, with current and potential investments worth more than \$US 40 billion.

2014 marks our second year on the UN Security Council. Australia remains firmly committed to constructive engagement on the Council, including on issues related to the African agenda, which represent around 70 per cent of the Council's work. We have appreciated the ongoing dialogue we have had on UNSC issues with African partners and look forward to further strengthening our engagement with African governments, the African Union and sub-regional bodies within the Council.

The theme for our Presidency of the Council in November this year will be 'resources and conflict'. This is an important agenda item for Africa. It also aligns with Australia's recent membership of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights and with work we are supporting in Africa, including research by the University of Pretoria's Centre for Human Rights that we are supporting through the Australian Development Research Awards program.

Australia's G20 Presidency in 2014 comes at a time when global growth is too low and unemployment too high. That is why Australia wants to focus on G20 outcomes to lift growth, create jobs and build the resilience of the international economy, concentrating on those issues where coordinated international action can add value, including trade, infrastructure, taxation and banking. These are key issues of public sector reform for African Governments and areas in which we are concentrating our efforts, particularly through our scholarships program. Australia values our close

cooperation with South Africa on a range of G20 issues, especially the development agenda where we co-chair the relevant working group.

We have also commenced our two-year tenure as chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). We are privileged to be working together with member countries, including a number from Africa, and dialogue partners to maximise the potential of this regional organisation which was established in 1997 and which has a broad-based agenda that spans the Indian Ocean region.

Pillars of development cooperation program in Africa

Australia's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has committed to a new approach to development cooperation, including in our Africa programming, that prioritises economic growth and jobs which in turn helps reduce poverty.

In line with this approach, our development cooperation in Africa is increasingly focussing on Aid for Trade – recognising the development benefits of economies being opened up to trade and investment.

Our approach to Aid for Trade includes seeking innovative models for partnering with the private sector, which is of course the engine of growth, to leverage our mutual capacities to contribute to development.

Australia Awards

Australia Awards remain the flagship of our development cooperation in Africa, with a focus on mining, agriculture and public policy.

We see skills development as an area of clear mutual interest with the private sector. We are delivering or developing a number of programs with the business community. These include partnerships with extractives industries to better drive vocational education and employment outcomes from the sector; an action learning program that targets key regional infrastructure projects in Africa and supports public sector officials

responsible for those projects by drawing on the expertise of the private sector; and a challenge fund to support innovation within the private sector to translate agricultural research into business opportunities.

However, our new approach does not neglect humanitarian programming or our work on women's empowerment or people living with disabilities. Australia maintains a focus on inclusive development and, in particular, recognises that empowering women and girls is one of the best ways to promote economic growth. We are hopeful of a visit by the Foreign Minister to South African shores in the not too distant future and we will hold our second African Women in Leadership Network Workshop to coincide with the visit should it eventuate.

Recent evaluations of Australia Awards have revealed overwhelmingly positive results. Alumni and their supervisors are consistent in their praise of the quality of the program and the educational experience gained by awardees. In the majority of cases, the individual benefits of the scholarships are being leveraged to achieve positive organisational change, and in many cases national and regional outcomes.

For example, an alumnus in Botswana has established a national immunisation framework for children that has increased the immunisation coverage rate from 45% to 92%. Work by alumni in Kenya introduced new approaches to agriculture at the district level that have increased farm output by around 30% and reduced post-harvest losses by 50%. In Zambia, alumni have contributed substantially to anti-corruption, and drafted national legislation including the recent Extractive Industries Bill. One alumnus is a member of the Technical Committee revising the National Constitution.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the strong partnerships with Australian, and increasingly African, universities under the scholarships program. You all can be justifiably proud of the contribution

you and your institutions are making to development in Africa. Evaluation reports will be available on the Awards website in the coming months.

Alumni support

The over 6000 Australian alumni in Africa remain the jewel in the crown of our scholarships program. I continue to be delighted at the number of influential and committed Africans I meet during my travels who identify as alumni of Australian universities. Finding innovative, meaningful ways to stay connected with and support these alumni is a priority for the Australian Government.

We are currently designing the next phase of our scholarships program in Africa. I encourage AAUN members to think creatively about how the network can work with the Australian Government to strengthen our joint engagement with, and support for, our alumni, both while they are on scholarship and when they return home. We would welcome your ideas.

Alumni events for 2014

As in 2013, we will be holding three major alumni events this year:

As mentioned previously, we plan to hold our second **African Women in Leadership Network Workshop** here in Pretoria. This workshop will engage women from all over Africa to further build their capacity to lead change and work on gender and development initiatives.

In July, we will hold our second **Alumni Ambassadors** workshop. Among other roles, Alumni Ambassadors assist Australia to raise the visibility of Australia Awards, provide peer support to new Awardees, and connect new Awardees with current in-Australia Awardees.

And the highlight of our Alumni calendar will be our **October Symposium** in Nairobi, focused on sharing Australia's experience in agriculture and mining.

The symposium will engage alumni from our various programs in deliberations on agriculture and mining sector issues. We will also invite attendance by representatives of key Australian Government organisations (CSIRO, ACIAR, IM4DC), Australian Development Research Awards partners, private sector representatives, Civil Society Organisations, EIDOS Foundation and - most importantly from the perspective of our event today – representatives from AAUN.

The 3-day Symposium will provide a platform for deliberations on future work in agriculture and extractives, including research partnerships.

We do hope that some representatives from AAUN will be in a position to attend what we believe, based on the success of the 2013 Cape Town event, will be an exceptional networking and educational opportunity. Details will be sent to the AAUN Secretariat shortly.

Concluding Remarks

I hope that this brief outline has reinforced the strong alignment between the objectives of the AAUN and the Australian Government in Africa.

Engagement between Australia and African countries continues to strengthen, including through our people to people and education links.

It has been particularly pleasing for me to witness the progress achieved by the AAUN in helping to build those links and I would like to again pay tribute to the excellent work of all involved.

I wish you every success for the 2014 AAUN Pretoria Workshop.

Thank you.