



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

Australian High Commissioner to South Africa, HE Mr Graeme Wilson

**Australia-Africa Universities Network Dinner
5 September 2013**

Professor Cheryl de la Rey, Co-Chairperson 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) and Professor of Physiology at the University of Sydney

Ambassador Francis Moloi, Chief Director, South Asia, South East Asia and Australasia in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation

Dr Alber van Jaarsveld, Chief Executive Officer, National Research Foundation

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

Ladies and gentlemen

It is wonderful to see a number of familiar faces and to be surrounded by a galaxy of Deans, Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Professors, Researchers, captains of industry and senior government officials

Among such illustrious company, I am only going to mention very quietly that I was once a humble tutor in Politics at Monash University before joining the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade over 30 years ago.

Firstly let me congratulate the AAUN on the impressive steps you have taken since your launch in July 2012 to build stronger links between Australian and African universities.

I am aware that the 2013 AAUN forum titled ‘The Power of Partnerships’ was a very successful event, and all indications are that your current workshop here in Pretoria is progressing equally as well.

As you all know, Australian Government engagement in Africa has grown substantially in recent years. We have established diplomatic relations with every African country. We have enhanced our diplomatic network, including through a new diplomatic mission in Ethiopia.

We have increased the tempo of high-level contact – Australian Foreign Ministers have been regular attendees at African Union Summits since 2009.

The Development Cooperation program has also grown substantially and has been very effective in contributing toward achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa.

The success of the program owes much to its approach of focusing on niche areas where Australian expertise matches African governments’ priorities and commitments to reform, including through building capacity in agriculture and natural resource management.

Australia appreciates that the creation of a skilled workforce, 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.

We acknowledge that a nation's future is built on the capacity of its institutions and people.

In working to build African capacity and our links with African countries, Australia draws heavily on our excellent education and research institutions that are vital not only to knowledge creation but also to our international linkages.

The Government funds a variety of research to improve the quality and effectiveness of Australia's aid program. It informs where and how our own, and our partners' resources can most effectively and efficiently be deployed, which in turn serves the overall purpose of ensuring the Australian aid program contributes to overcoming poverty.

It addresses the wide range of challenges to development in our partner countries, to assist us to monitor development impacts, and to better target

programs. For those of you who have not already viewed the document, I recommend AusAID's Research Strategy 2012 to 2017 which is available on the AusAID website.

AusAID's Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS) program sits under this strategy and I am aware that a number of institutions here tonight are recipients of funding under that program. I

look forward to learning of the progress of the Scheme, and understand that the first round of reports is due shortly. This research will contribute enormously to future programs in Africa.

I can also mention the work we are doing in CSIRO and ACIAR's partnerships with African sub-regional organisations and international organisations that align with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) which has been endorsed by African leaders.

Australia Awards is of course the flagship of our capacity building program in Africa, acknowledging that scholarships are a key part of the Australian Government's commitment to supporting African countries to reach their development goals.

We were providing about 100 scholarships to Africa in 2008 and in 2012 we delivered over 1000 awards to 50 countries.

I acknowledge the great work that Australian universities are doing in implementing the program, including through educating and training scholars from African countries and through delivering high quality pastoral care. This commitment is helping to ensure a positive Australian experience for awardees and to strengthen their attachment to Australia.

I also welcome the high quality joint training delivery that is being undertaken between Australian and African universities through the Australia Awards Fellowships (formerly called short-course awards). This training reflects well on the efforts that universities in Australia and Africa are making in developing strong and growing relationships.

Our work in the mining sector is another example of how the Government is drawing on the power of linkages, networks and relationships between Australia and the countries of Africa in contributing to development in Africa and to building personal connections between Australians and Africans.

Our work in the mining sector acknowledges the enormous potential for a well-managed and environmentally sustainable mining sector to contribute to broader development in Africa.

In 2012, we delivered 132 Africa Fellowship (or short course) Awards and Masters level mining awards to participants from 36 countries under the Australia Awards program. Another 132 are being delivered in 2013 through partnerships between Australian and African institutions.

In addition, since 2011, AusAID has funded 542 officials from 36 African countries to participate in 20 mining governance study tours to Australia. These tours share Australian mining governance experience and are core networks building blocks, which help address mining-related issues in Africa.

The recent Mining Governance and Africa Down Under Study Tour, for example, contributed to African government officials' understanding of the frameworks governing the mining industry in Australia, enabling them to apply, as appropriate, lessons and learning in their home countries.

We are also creating opportunities for graduates to become involved in internships in both Australian and African organisations. One example is a pilot 18-month vocational learning internship program through a

partnership between a South African civil engineering firm, BIGEN Africa, and Australia's national skills council for the resources sector, SkillsDMC . This program provides practical project exposure and ongoing professional development for 25 participants from 6 African governments who are involved in planning and managing infrastructure developments.

Since 2007, more than 4,000 Africans have been trained through programs such as those I have mentioned, and funded through Australia's development cooperation program. These leaders form the base of a very active alumnus.

Members of my diplomatic team and I are often approached by Africans from government, private sector and NGOs who identify themselves as being Australian Alumni – who are eager to maintain links with Australia.

To harness this enthusiasm we have this year launched three major Alumni initiatives to provide ongoing educational, cultural and business opportunities. These are the:

- Women in Leadership special interest group launched in Liberia in March 2013
- Alumni Ambassadors launched in Pretoria in April 2013
- And next week in Cape Town, the “Leading Change” Conference highlighting the role of Australia Awards Alumni in Africa's development.

The Cape Town Conference is about leadership and development and acknowledges that Alumni are ambassadors for the Australia Awards program and are linchpins for continued and deepening links between Australia and Africa.

It is intended to encourage Alumni to continue being catalysts who bring about collective change in Africa.

The proceedings from the conference will be available on the website. I invite AAUN members to review those proceedings and to keep in touch with our other Alumni work through the Australia Awards website.

The Australian High Commission in Pretoria, for our part, will also keep in touch with and track the progress of the Australia Africa Universities network. We will look to support activities of the Network where possible, as I have discussed with Cheryl.

I wish you well for the remainder of your conference, and for next year's 'Africa Forum' here in Pretoria in April.