

Queen's Baton Relay Reception

Gaborone 1 May 2017

DHOM Vote of Thanks

The Hon Kagiso Thutlwe, His Worship the Mayor of Gaborone City;

Ms Miriam Moyo, Regional Vice President for Africa of the Commonwealth Games Federation;

Mr Negroes Malealea Kgosietsile, President of the Commonwealth Games Association of Botswana, and the Board of the Botswana National Olympic Committee;

Mr Tuelo Serufho, CEO of the Commonwealth Games Association of Botswana;

Presidents of the National Sporting Federations of Botswana;

My fellow Australians and at least one New Zealander from the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation, whom I'm sure are enjoying a very warm welcome not only here in Botswana, but throughout the African leg of the Queen's Baton Relay;

Excellencies, diplomats, distinguished guests;

Good evening, dumelang.

It is always a pleasure to be in Gaborone, but particularly this evening as we welcome the Queen's Baton to Botswana. Thank you to our friends from Botswana both for your immense hospitality, and for the enthusiastic reception the Baton has received today as it continues its journey towards the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games in Australia.

The Baton is still in the relatively early stages of its 388 day, 230,000 kilometre tour across all 70 Commonwealth nations and territories. This is the longest and most accessible Queen's Baton Relay in history, that will directly involve more of the Commonwealth's 2.3 billion people than ever before.

The Relay is off to a great start in Africa after leaving Buckingham Palace in London on 13 March – a start full of colour, energy and community spirit. I have no doubt that will continue as the Baton travels around beautiful Botswana over the next few days. In the best traditions of the Queen's Baton Relay, we've already seen great excitement from Botswana, particularly the hundreds of students who were miraculously convinced to wear school uniforms on a public holiday! They exemplify the spirit of the 'friendly Games'.

It is that spirit of friendship and inclusion at the heart of competition at the Commonwealth Games, and indeed at the heart of the Commonwealth itself as an institution, of which we can all be proud as we look forward to the great festival of sport ahead on the Gold Coast.

The Gold Coast will host the largest integrated sports program in the history of the Commonwealth Games, comprising 18 sports and seven para-sports. All para-sports events will be contested alongside non-para sports events, and medals for para-sports events will count towards the medal tally for national teams. For the first time in the history of a major multi-sport games, there will be an equal number of medals for men and women.

Australia and Botswana already enjoy warm relations, ever strengthened by growing links between our two peoples, including through education and tourism. But there is arguably no greater vehicle to bring people together than sport!

We look forward to welcoming the Botswana team to Australia for the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games in April next year, as part of the more than 6,600 athletes and team officials who will land on our shores for 11 days of competition and friendship.

Gold Coast is a truly beautiful city. It is home to some iconic beaches – and we Australians know what we’re talking about when it comes to beaches – providing quite a contrast to the stunning bush and delta vistas of Botswana. When the serious business of the competition is done, I hope the Botswana athletes and team officials will also have the chance to explore a little.

These will be the 11th Commonwealth Games in which Botswana has competed. We at the Australian High Commission will be barracking for Botswana to better its previous best tally of four medals, although perhaps not at the expense of an Australian athlete! As Botswana athletes strive for success, we hope that communities across Botswana can also share in the excitement of a truly world-class event.

We wish all athletes well with their preparations and training, and look forward to seeing them in action in a year.

Thank you. Ke a leboga (*Keh-ah-leh-boh-ha*).