

Statement by High Commissioner-designate for Australia, Mr Graeme Wilson, on the presentation of credentials to His Majesty King Letsie, King of the Kingdom of Lesotho

Your Majesty, I bring warm greetings from the Governor-General and people of Australia.

Your Majesty, it is a pleasure to be in your beautiful country for the first time. I am presenting credentials to you at an important point in Australia's engagement with the Kingdom of Lesotho and with the African continent more broadly.

Australia sincerely appreciated the Kingdom of Lesotho's early support for our recent election to the United Nations Security Council. As Australia commences its 2013-14 term on Council, we are committed to deepening our engagement with African partners, and to consulting widely on peace and security issues that affect Africa directly. We look forward to cooperating with Lesotho in all aspects of the Council's work.

It gives me great pleasure to note that Lesotho and Australia are close friends. We have much in common, not least our shared membership of the Commonwealth. Our bilateral relationship has gained momentum over recent years, and I am confident that this momentum will continue to gather pace.

Your Majesty, I would like to take this early opportunity to congratulate the Government and people of Lesotho on a successful and peaceful election in May last year. Your country's commitment to building a healthy democracy based on effective coalition government is a good example for other African nations and shows what can be achieved if there is the vision and the will.

The Australian Government welcomed the reappointment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, the Hon Kenneth Tsekoa, following the election. The Honourable Minister is a good friend of Australia's, and we have appreciated, in particular, his willingness to hold regular dialogues with Australian ministers at successive African Union summits. I look forward to working closely with him during my term as High Commissioner.

Australia very much appreciated Lesotho's participation in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth in 2011. We were also very pleased that the Minister of Mining, Mr Khasu, was able to attend the Africa DownUnder conference in Perth in August last year.

The Australian Government is delighted that Your Majesty is proposing to make a private visit to Australia this year.

Australia has welcomed the opportunity to support some of Lesotho's development priorities through the provision of scholarships, training and the placement of volunteers. We were pleased to conclude, last year, an Exchange of Letters concerning arrangements for the deployment of Australian volunteers.

Australia will continue to offer development assistance in key areas such as mining for development; electoral management; and peace-keeping and law enforcement, including training in the areas of police forensics and money laundering. Australia will also continue to provide support to Lesotho through regional initiatives such as the SADC Climate Change Plan of Action, and the SADC Trans-Boundary Water Management Program, to which Australia has committed A\$17.5 million.

I note that trade between our two countries has been slowly developing over the last few years, albeit off a low base. In 2009, our bilateral trade was valued at A\$1.2 million, growing to almost A\$2.5 million in 2011-12, with the balance of trade being very much in Lesotho's favour. This trend augurs well for future trade relations.

Your Majesty, my Government is committed to working closely with you and your Government to grow the potential of our bilateral relationship. As Australia's High Commissioner to the Kingdom of Lesotho, I pledge to work tirelessly towards that goal.

Your Majesty, with these words of friendship and commitment, I have the honour to present to you the letter of recall of my predecessor and the letter of credence accrediting me as Australia's High Commissioner to the Kingdom of Lesotho.