



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

Australian High Commissioner to South Africa, HE Mr Graeme Wilson

**Advance screening of The Sapphires
23 May 2013**

Ladies and gentlemen

Welcome to tonight's advance screening of *The Sapphires*. It is so good to see a full house of diplomatic colleagues, other distinguished guests and friends of Australia one and all. It is a great time to be Australia's High Commissioner to South Africa as there is so much happening in the relationship and so much to look forward to.

On the cultural front, we have been all systems go since the day I arrived, including an Australian group at the International Jazz Festival in Cape Town, the premiere of the opera *Otello* – which was a joint collaboration between Cape Town Opera, four Australian state operas and the New Zealand opera – a screening of the finalists of the famous short-film contest called Tropfest, and now the advance screening of this great movie called *The Sapphires*.

As some of you may know, *The Sapphires* is a critically acclaimed Australian film that follows the story of four talented Australian Aboriginal girls who are discovered by a talent scout and form a highly successful musical group that travels to Vietnam in 1968 to sing for the American troops.

The Sapphires is inspired by the true story of a group of Aboriginal women born along the Murray River in Australia, who regularly sang together during the 1960's and 70's. The 'real' *Sapphires* tour of Vietnam was an extraordinary achievement for young Aboriginal women at that time,

considering that Aboriginal people had just received the right to vote. All of the 'real' Sapphires still live in Australia and hold prominent community leadership positions in the medical, tourism and education sectors.

As Australia's High Commissioner to South Africa, I am very keen to support cultural exchanges in the film sector, and hope that 'The Sapphires' will be well received by South African audiences. For those of you in tonight's audience who are involved in the film industry, you might be interested to know that Australia and South Africa have recently established a film co-production agreement, which aims to streamline some of the administrative and funding issues around cooperation in film-making. There are many practical benefits to the treaty which allow Australian and South African filmmakers to pool their creative and financial resources. Anyone interested in obtaining further information about this initiative should feel free to contact our office.

For any of you who have had a tough day at the office or at home, if you don't come out of this movie feeling uplifted, then we will refund your tickets. And for those of you who have had a good day, it will only get better.

So please everyone, just sit back and enjoy the show.

Thank you.