



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

**Remarks by Australian High Commissioner, HE Mr Graeme Wilson
at the opening night of the international production of *Verdi's Otello*
Cape Town, 6 April 2013**

I am delighted to be here tonight for the premiere of *Verdi's Otello*, an artistic collaboration of unprecedented scope involving six southern hemisphere opera companies¹. I'm sure all of you here would agree that tonight's performance was breath-taking, and that all the cast, crew and staff have done a tremendous job in executing such an ambitious and large-scale production. I know that when it comes to co-productions of this size, there are countless numbers of people involved both on stage and behind the scenes. All of you deserve huge congratulations. I would particularly like to single out Michael Williams, the Managing Director of Cape Town Opera, and Carolyn Chard, the General Manager of the West Australian Opera, for the crucial role they each played in conceiving this co-production. Warm congratulations also to the creative team behind the show, all of whom have done a fantastic job.

The Australian High Commission in Pretoria is very proud to be making a contribution, however modest, to the *Otello* production through our Public Diplomacy program. In particular, we were pleased to be able to assist key members of the Australian creative team (namely Director Simon Phillips, Set Designer Dale Ferguson and Lighting Designer Nick Schlieper) to travel to Cape Town for tonight's premiere. I'd also like to thank the Australian Airline Qantas, represented here tonight by Michelle van Wyk, for coming on board as a co-sponsor of the production.

A very rewarding and important part of my role as Australia's High Commissioner to South Africa is to promote cultural exchange between Australian and South African artistic communities. In my view, collaborative exchanges such as *Otello* are of vital importance for not only the significant opportunities they create for the

¹ Cape Town Opera, West Australian Opera, Victorian Opera, State Opera of South Australia, New Zealand Opera, and Opera Queensland

individual artists involved, but also for the institutional linkages they build between our respective countries. The people-to-people links that will be driven by the *Otello* collaboration as the production tours South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, will further enrich the bilateral relationship.

This production comes at a time when Australia and South Africa have never been more connected – through trade and investment, multilateral cooperation and people-to-people links, in the cultural sector but also through business, education, tourism, and sport.

As many of you know, there is a large South African diaspora in Australia and growing numbers of Australians living and working in South Africa. South Africa continues to be Australia's largest trading partner in Africa, and there is significant Australian investment in the South African resources sector.

On the development cooperation front, the relationship between Australia and South Africa has been strong for many years, particularly in the human resource development field. Not only is this work having strong impacts for the poorest people on the African continent, it is proving to be immensely valuable in diversifying and consolidating our ongoing people-to-people links and fostering strong ties between Australian and South African educational institutions.

There are also many new and exciting opportunities emerging for increased bilateral cooperation – including on important science and technology issues such as our joint hosting of the enormous Square Kilometre Array telescope; on international financial and economic reform through our respective membership of the G20 (which Australia is gearing up to host in 2014); and on regional peace and security issues during Australia's two-year term on the United Nations Security Council.

In this context, ensuring we have respect and understanding of one another's culture and identity is fundamental to maintaining a dynamic relationship. By bringing together such an immensely talented group of musicians, vocalists and creative specialists, the *Otello* production has made a welcome contribution to that endeavour. I can only hope that it marks the beginning of a new era of 'trans-Indian Ocean' productions that showcase our countries' respective creative strengths.

Thank you all for coming tonight. I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening.