



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

Australia Day speech by the Australian High Commissioner to South Africa, HE Mr Graeme Wilson, at the inauguration of the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce in Southern Africa (ABCSA) at the Johannesburg Country Club on 27 January 2014

The Minister for Mineral Resources, the Hon Susan Shabangu
Heads of Mission and other diplomatic colleagues
Ambassador Anil Sooklal, Deputy Director General for Asia in the Department of International Relations and Cooperation
Other senior government officials
The inaugural Chairman of the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce in Southern Africa, Michael Templeton
Senior business representatives, including the sponsor of this event, Robert Willes from Challenger Energy and representatives of his local partner, Bundu
All other distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

It is wonderful to see so many friends of Australia here tonight, and from such diverse fields, including government, business, academia, sport, culture and media. For those of you who have travelled from afar, including the many of you who have motored down the N1 from Pretoria, thank you very much for coming to Johannesburg. The main reason we are here is because we want to use the event to inaugurate the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce in Southern Africa (ABCSA) and there is no doubt that Johannesburg is the business capital of this country.

I feel privileged to be addressing you at one of the first National Day celebrations of the year, particularly at such an important time in South Africa's history, with 2014 marking the twentieth anniversary of democracy and freedom in this vibrant, diverse and beautiful country.

It also comes at a time when South Africans, and indeed all of us, are just getting used to the fact that Nelson Mandela, the man who changed the course of this nation's history and inspired the world, is no longer with us although his legacy will live on forever. The attendance of Australia's Head of Government, Prime Minister Tony Abbott, accompanied by the Leader of the Opposition Bill Shorten, at the Memorial Service highlighted our nation's respect for Nelson Mandela across the political

spectrum and reflected the international leadership role successive Australian Governments played in contributing to the demise of apartheid.

Australia and South Africa share much in common. In addition to our strong historical ties, we are countries with a common history of migration and multiculturalism. We share the fundamental values of democracy, equality, human rights and respect for the rule of law. Our economies are highly dependent on commodities and there are striking similarities in climate and landscape. Perhaps most importantly, Australia and South Africa have very close people-to-people links, including through sport, culture and our respective diasporas. Education linkages, including through our Australia Awards scholarships program, are also a very high priority for us and it is wonderful to see South Africa's Australia Awards Alumni Ambassador here tonight, as well as the Vice-Chancellors of the University of Pretoria and UNISA.

It is an exciting time to be Australia's High Commissioner to South Africa, with Australia taking on a number of important international responsibilities and with the bilateral relationship going from strength to strength.

2014 will mark the second year of our term on the UN Security Council. Australia is firmly committed to being a constructive, pragmatic and responsible Council member, including on issues related to the African agenda, which represent around 70 per cent of the Council's work. Australia has appreciated the constructive dialogue we have had on UNSC issues with African partners, including South Africa. We look forward to further strengthening our engagement with South Africa and with the African Union and sub-regional organisations such as SADC, as we continue to exercise our responsibilities on the Security Council through to the end of 2014.

Australia's G20 Presidency in 2014 comes at a time when global growth is too low and unemployment too high. That is why Australia wants to maintain a tight focus on G-20 outcomes that will lift growth, create jobs and build the resilience of the international economy. As Prime Minister Abbott noted last week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the G20 agenda this year will concentrate on those issues where coordinated international action can add value, including trade, infrastructure, taxation and banking. Australia values our close cooperation with South Africa, both as a co-chair of the Development Working Group and a key G-20 partner.

Australia also recently became chair for a two-year period of the Indian Ocean regional organisation renamed the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). We look forward to working with member countries, including South Africa, to maximise the potential of this organisation. We also look forward to developing our bilateral dialogue on the Asia-Pacific, which is an area of growing importance for South Africa, including through its role in BRICS.

All these shared strategic interests are creating opportunities for a significant increase in bilateral engagement and high-level political visits. With Australia hosting the G20 Summit in Brisbane in November 2014 and various Ministerial meetings throughout the year, we look forward to welcoming to our shores President Zuma and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance and Trade, among others. We are also hopeful

that Australia's Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, will visit South Africa during the course of the year.

These visits will add further political energy to what is already a substantive and diverse bilateral relationship. The breadth of the relationship was evident during the Senior Officials Talks held in Canberra in May last year. As a result of the meeting, a Bilateral Plan of Action was agreed and we recently held a very productive six-monthly review of that plan which highlighted progress in a range of key areas and the potential to do even more.

At the top of the list is trade and investment. South Africa is by far Australia's largest trade and investment partner in Africa, although commercial links with a number of other African countries are increasing. Two-way trade with South Africa of some AUD3.2 billion represents around 27% of Australia's total African trade while two-way investment is AUD 5 billion, focused in the mining sector. Yet there is considerable scope to build on those figures and to diversify our trade and investment links.

That is why it is great to have an event such as this one and to be able to inaugurate, through no less than Minister Shabangu, the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce in Southern Africa. This event would not have been possible without the hard work of the inaugural Chairman of the Chamber, Michael Templeton, supported by the High Commission and Austrade, and without the generous sponsorship of Challenger Energy and Bundu. Challenger is an ASX-listed oil and gas explorer that is committed to entering the world-class shale gas province of the Karoo Basin via its South Africa-based subsidiary, Bundu Gas and Oil Exploration.

Australia will be featuring prominently at Mining Indaba in Cape Town next week and I expect to renew acquaintances with many of you there. The Premier of Western Australia, Colin Barnett, will join Minister Shabangu and other political and business leaders as one of the keynote speakers at the event. Mining Indaba will provide an opportunity for Australian companies to showcase their expertise and discuss investment projects with African mining ministers and senior officials. For our part, the Australian Government continues to support African Government efforts to maximise the economic growth, job creation and development benefits from their mining sectors. We see increasing opportunities for Australia to support public/private sector partnerships in skills development, particularly in infrastructure and mining.

Of course, Australia's links with South Africa go well beyond trade and investment. The Square Kilometre Array, the world's largest radio telescope, is perhaps the most exciting scientific project on the international stage. It involves dual siting of dishes between two major Southern Hemisphere countries: South Africa and Australia. Our work together on the SKA will open enormous scientific, technological and commercial opportunities.

Our sporting and cultural links are also extensive. Australia and South Africa are arguably the two most passionate sporting nations on earth. The in-form Australian

cricket team arrives at the end of this week for a 3-Test series against the world's number one side, South Africa. It should be a fantastic series. As to rugby, probably the less said the better at this stage although Australia is definitely showing signs of improvement. While the focus is often on our rugby or cricket rivalry at the elite level, the reality is that there are constant sporting exchanges between Australia and South Africa at all levels – including netball, hockey, swimming, golf and even Australian Rules Football of which there are now 22,000 registered players in South Africa, both boys and girls, many of whom are from informal settlements. I am a great believer in the power of sport to develop team skills and leadership, and to build bridges between communities and nations. I still love doing football and cricket coaching whenever I can find time. The only problem is my body keeps telling me I should stick to my diplomatic duties!

We have also been active in promoting cultural exchanges, including the international launch in Cape Town of the opera *Otello*, participation in the Cape Town International Jazz Festival and Open Book Festival and the hosting of a short-film festival, called Tropfest. We are planning a photographic exhibition to mark the 20th anniversary of democracy in South Africa.

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to the excellent team at the Australian High Commission, including my Austrade colleagues, for their tremendous support, professionalism and team spirit. I would also like to thank my diplomatic colleagues, government officials across many departments and the various universities and think tanks for your cooperation and friendship over the past 12 months since my arrival. We look forward to building on that collaboration throughout this year.

Finally, I would like to thank the Minister for Mineral Resources, Susan Shabangu, for being our guest of honour today and for agreeing to inaugurate the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce in Southern Africa. Minister, you have been a good friend of the Australian High Commission and a star of the Africa Down Under Mining Conference, for a number of years. We very much appreciate your support and personal engagement.

With those words, could I ask you to join me in a toast to the friendship between Australia and South Africa and to a peaceful and prosperous 2014. To friendship, peace and prosperity!