



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

**Speech by Australian High Commissioner, HE Mr Graeme Wilson
for University of Southern Queensland's Graduation and Alumni
Function**

11th May 2013

I would like to start by congratulating all the graduates of the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) here today.

I understand that USQ has been providing distance education programs to students from Southern Africa for nineteen years and there are now many hundreds of South African graduates who have studied with USQ.

Congratulations to the southern African support office for the wonderful support you have provided the students over nearly two decades.

I am sure you will all agree there is immense value in the 'universities without walls' concept, such as the USQ model within which you have obtained your degrees.

Online universities allow Africans continent-wide to take advantage of educational opportunities offered by quality Australian universities and thereby gain access to state-of-the-art educational methods and materials.

This approach to tertiary education is ideally suited to addressing the development challenges Africa faces, by enabling remote training of a cadre of highly qualified professionals - including the graduates here today.

Professionals who contribute strongly to Africa's development and to effectively addressing the Millennium Development Goals.

Importantly, the approach also enables students and alumni to become part of the global learning community.

Australia-South Africa bilateral relationship

I have just come back from Australia where I attended the fifth Australia – South Africa Senior Officials Meeting. It was for me, a great opportunity to discuss with a range of Australian and South African government departments how we can encourage and stimulate different government agencies, civil society and the business sector to take advantage of some exciting multilateral and regional opportunities and events to give the bilateral relationship a real boost in profile.

As you are probably aware, Australia won a non-permanent seat on the United National Security Council for the 2013-2014 term. South Africa finished its term on the UNSC in December last year and we are keen to use this opportunity to increase our engagement with South Africa on Security Council issues for mutual benefit. Around seventy per cent of UNSC issues relate to African hotspots and South Africa has a strong African leadership role so we are keen to work with the South African government to inform our decision-making on African UNSC issues.

In 2014, Australia will host the G20, the pre-eminent global economic governance body, and we intend to work closely with South Africa which is the only African member of the organisation. Our shared interest includes the development agenda and the reform of global financial institutions. We are also looking to work jointly with South Africa to increase outreach on the G20 to other African countries to ensure that their voices are heard and that the G20 is transparent, accountable and as relevant as possible for Africa.

We will also Chair the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation which is the principal Indian Ocean regional body. We will work closely with South Africa and other Indian Ocean partners in seeking to reinvigorate the organisation and direct its efforts to more practical

outcomes so as to benefit the diverse members (from South East Asia, the Gulf, Australia and Africa) of the organisation.

One of the most exciting opportunities for the bilateral relationship is that presented by our joint hosting of the world's largest scientific project, the Square Kilometre Array, a huge radio telescope that will gather data from billions of distant galaxies. We are already cooperating closely on many aspects of the project and will also seek to use the project as a catalyst to increase our broader science and technology cooperation.

Australia's bilateral relationship with South Africa is tracking very well and with the new opportunities mentioned above, we hope to focus the relationship practically so that Australians and South Africans look to each other as reliable partners. There is already considerable breadth and depth to the relationship, which is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding signed by our respective Foreign Ministers in September 2010. We have nine treaty-level agreements with South Africa, covering areas as diverse as double taxation, air services, science and technology, film coproduction, defence cooperation and extradition.

Our political leaders and ministers meet regularly, including in the margins of international meetings. Most recently, in January 2013, Australia's Parliamentary Secretary (Deputy Minister) for Foreign Affairs undertook a bilateral visit to South Africa. Australia's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister met President Zuma and Foreign Minister Nkoana-Mashabane in the margins of last year's UN General Assembly. Our hope is that President Zuma will also be able to take up an invitation for a visit to Australia, possibly some time after the South African elections in 2014.

South Africa continues to be Australia's largest trading partner in Africa, and there is significant Australian investment in the South African resources sector and a similar level of South African investment in the Australian mining and retail sectors.

The relationship is also built on strong people-to-people links, with a large South African diaspora in Australia and growing numbers of Australians living and working in South Africa. These people-to-people links are fostered through sport, tourism, business, the cultural sector, and increasingly, by the strong ties between Australian and South African educational institutions. I firmly believe that the diaspora is a valuable resource. We will look at ways we can utilise this large group of skilled people who now live in Australia but who will never forget South Africa and its magic. These are the people who have taken Nando's Chicken to Australia where it has been received with open arms – and mouths - and also the same people who could see the value of Australian icons such as Country Road and Trennery and have made them now South African owned under the Woolworths' family.

On our education relationship specifically, over 500 South African students are currently enrolled in Australian education institutions, both onshore and offshore. And there are some 24 agreements on cooperation, staff and student exchange or research collaboration between Australian universities and universities or like institutions in South Africa.¹

These agreements not only consolidate links between Australian and South African institutions, but between the institutions of our two countries and African institutions more broadly as well. For example, South Africa's Stellenbosch University and Sydney University's Faculty of Agriculture and Environment have developed partnerships with the University of Nairobi in delivering in post-harvest Management of maize, rice and legumes. Similarly, University of Queensland's private provider, UniQuest, is utilising Afro-Australian academic partnerships to deliver courses including working with University of Pretoria in International Diplomacy, Organisational Development and in Public-Private Partnership training - to which I will return in a moment.

¹ including agreements between Australian institutions and the University of Pretoria, the University of Stellenbosch, University of Cape Town, Rhodes University, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Walter Sisulu University, University of Fort Hare, University of Zululand and Wits

Development partnership

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 also proving to be immensely valuable in developing and consolidating our ongoing people-to-people links.

Both South Africa and Australia recognise the importance of building human capacity in our development cooperation. It is key to development, delivering far-reaching social and economic returns. It is fundamental to sustainable exploitation of resources, and the creation of wealth and jobs. For this reason, it attracts about 25 per cent of Australia's Africa program budget.

Tertiary sector cooperation

At the tertiary level, I have already referred to the increasing development ties between Australian universities and universities in Africa, and particularly in South Africa.

And now I would like to highlight the great work between the University of Queensland and the University of Pretoria in delivering practical Regional Diplomacy Training during 2011 and 2012, as a case in point. The program commenced with two courses in 2011 involving the two universities and the Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Centre in Accra, and expanded to involve around 20 African countries. A total of 10 courses have been delivered to date.

The courses were developed in close cooperation with Australian Embassies and High Commissions, involved both academics and practitioners, and most importantly, responded to direct requests for assistance from our partner governments. They enabled extensive cross-fertilisation of ideas between countries and were melting pots for new

relationships and friendships between individuals across the continent. We are currently planning events for 2013 to bring alumni of these programs together to ensure the momentum created in the diplomatic field by those courses in Africa is maintained.

Australia-Africa Partnerships Facility (AAPF)

Another program of ongoing cooperation is the Australia-Africa Partnerships Facility. Established in 2010, the Facility is a fast-response aid delivery mechanism that mobilises both training and technical assistance in direct response to requests from partner governments. It has worked with more than 1000 Africans to date, again in African government priority areas.

The facility works with African governments, including the South African Department of Minerals and Energy, to enhance the sustainability and development benefits of extractives industries. South Africa's recent involvement in the work of the facility has included participating in a number of study tours to Australia. The frequent involvement of Australian, South African and other stakeholder governments' ministers and senior level ministry officials in AAPF activities makes it a key to strengthening our partnerships.

Scholarships Program

You are all no doubt also aware of Australia Awards, through which scholarships for 51 countries in Africa, including for South Africa, are provided. Over 450 South African students have studied at Australian universities through these scholarships since 1996. These students are part of over 5,000 African students the Australian Government has supported to study in Australia since 1960. This represents over 50 years commitment to development in Africa, and demonstrates the high value Australia places on its relationship with Africa and South Africa. In line with South Africa's development priorities, Australia's most significant aid investment in South Africa is in human resource development.

Alumni

Our substantial engagement in human capacity building means we have a growing cadre of alumni – from our scholarships program alone, our alumni in Africa stand at around 5000. We are currently consolidating strategies so that we can more formally engage with these alumni and with alumni from other AusAID programs. For example, in March 2013 we launched an African Women in Leadership Network to engage women alumni on women’s issues and opportunities, as well as an Alumni Ambassador Initiative of high-profile volunteer champions to assist promoting and representing our programs. We are collaborating with South Africa to hold a major alumni conference, which will focus on the topic of “leading change”, in Cape Town from 16-18 September.

The conference will engage 125 high calibre alumni with South African, Australian and international development experts to generate ideas for future Africa-wide development strategies.

We have a budding South African Alumni Association that is open to both privately funded alumni and scholarships alumni. I urge you to join up through the Australia Awards website and in doing so to maintain your links with Australia and with colleagues who have benefitted from Australia’s tertiary sector.

Conclusion

I hope that my remarks today have helped to give you a better understanding of Australia’s relationship with South Africa and that I have been able to convey some of my enthusiasm for further increasing the current level of cooperation.

It is an exciting time for the bilateral relationship, with Australia on the UN Security Council in 2013-14 and hosting the G20 Summit in 2014, with the huge SKA scientific cooperation project underway and with enormous opportunities to build on our people-to-people connections, including

through sport, culture, tourism and education. Given our expanding development assistance profile, we are also placing increasing emphasis on using delivery partners with credibility and a track record – and in my view that spells opportunity for both Australian and South African academic institutions.