



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION

PRETORIA

Speech to University of Southern Queensland Graduation ceremony

Saturday 27 May 2010

Remarks by Ann Harrap, Australian High Commissioner to South Africa

Thanks very much for inviting me to be with you today at this graduation reception. Although I'm not strictly an alumni of the USQ, I did graduate from a Queensland University and so I'm particularly pleased to be able to spend some time with Honorary Queenslanders!

And what a week it is for us to be coming together.

On Wednesday night of this week I welcomed the Australian national football team, the Socceroos, to South Africa - the first national team to arrive for the FIFA 2010 World Cup. The excitement at the airport was absolutely palpable and with only a few days to go before the start of the tournament I'm so pleased to see South Africans getting behind this showcase event.

But of course it's not just South Africans. Australia is also very much behind this FIFA World Cup being held in South Africa. It was a tremendous triumph for the country and Africa as a whole to be granted the right to host the tournament. And we are expecting it to be a great success.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as I said, our team was the first to arrive in South Africa and Australia will be one of only five (5) participating teams that will be playing friendly matches here on South African soil in advance of the World Cup – Australia will be playing Denmark on 1 June and the US on 5 June at the Ruimsig stadium. I use the term 'friendly' but of course those games will be anything but.....

To my mind the playing of these friendlies and the early arrival is a real demonstration of our commitment to, and support for, the game and South Africa - because collectively those friendly games will give 10,000 kids from the township areas around Roodepoort a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see a world-class football match. That's something that the Australian team and Australian government can be very proud of.

Australia is also supporting this FIFA 2010 World Cup by sending thousands of fans to support our team, spend money in this economy, and enjoy South Africa's wonderful hospitality. Over 43,000 tickets have been sold to Australians – putting us among the top five nations in terms of ticket sales. By our estimation that means at least 10,000 Aussies on the ground – here to have a great time at what we know will be a fantastic FIFA World Cup.

When I graduated from the University of Queensland in 1989 with an Arts/Law degree I had no idea that over 20 years later I would be standing as Australia's High Commissioner to South Africa welcoming our national team to play in the World's greatest sporting event.

I didn't know that I would be spending my days liaising with senior political figures around the world or actively promoting my country – it's multiculturalism, its vibrant economy (even in the face of the global financial crisis), its sophistication, or its contribution to the international stage.

But I did know that with a quality Australian education I had the tool to help me take advantage of every opportunity presented to me and more importantly - to make my own opportunities. I had the skills, the confidence and the discipline to reach for the sky and grab my star. In my view, talent and luck only play a small part in success – really, it's about equipping and preparing yourself and then persevering to get what you want.

Graduates, you have already demonstrated your determination to drive your own futures through your commitment to, and success at, your studies. You have prepared yourselves to the best of your abilities and you are now the creators of your own destinies, the future leaders of this country – whether that is in politics, business, arts and culture, development, sport or even diplomacy.

You are also, I hasten to tell you – not only Honorary Queenslanders but honorary ambassadors for Australia.

You are part of the glue that pulls together the relationship between Australia and South Africa.

And that relationship is growing from strength to strength.

In the last year we have had more high-level political visits between Australia and South Africa than in the last seven years. The Australian Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith, visited in January of this year and then in March the Deputy South African Foreign Minister went to Australia.

Those high-level political visits redressed a period of neglect which should never be repeated.

They provided an opportunity for both sides to acknowledge the importance of a strong bilateral partnership as well as to highlight the value in working cooperatively together on issues of global importance – such as climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and economic development.

These are all issues that cannot be managed by individual nations acting alone – they all require a coordinated multilateral response and Australia is keen to work closely with African nations, including South Africa, to tackle them.

The increase in high-level political visits I referred to also provided an opportunity to review the trade and investment pillars of the bilateral relationship.

As some of you may be aware, South Africa is by far Australia's largest and most dynamic market in Africa, with trade growing an average of 7 per cent over the past five years.

In 2008-09 two-way trade, including goods and services, was more than 4 billion Australian dollars, or 28 billion rand.

Despite the economic downturn, Australia has continued to be an important export market for South African goods, particularly motor vehicles.

It may interest you to know, that South Africa exports more to Australia than it does to any country in the Middle East or Southeast Asia, including countries such as Brazil and Canada.

Increasingly, Australia and South Africa are doing more together in the African region – and that is a very pleasing development. We are cooperating to deliver desperately needed assistance to the people of Zimbabwe, and through our joint membership of the United Nations Peacebuilding Committee, we are helping to address the peace and conflict agenda in other parts of Africa.

But of course, it is our people-to-people links that provide the strongest adhesive for the relationship.

We are great competitors in sports such as cricket, rugby and football. This competition is fierce and ongoing but the linkages built between our countries are enduring.

Our cultural links are also important.

Australia and South Africa have recently concluded negotiations on a bilateral film co-production agreement that will make it easier for jointly scripted, financed and produced feature films to be made in either country.

You would know Graduates, from your studies, that Australia is a country of migration and a proud and tolerant multicultural society.

Australia is home to a significant South African-born community many of whom migrated in the decades prior to the end of apartheid.

This community is an asset to both our countries and a means to broaden and deepen our social, cultural and economic engagement.

The other way to do that, of course, is through education linkages.

We have a growing alumni of South African students who have studied with Australian institutions but we also have a large number of linkages between the institutions themselves.

My government is very keen for these linkages to grow and a few weeks ago the Australian Foreign Minister Mr Smith announced an \$8 million Research Partnerships program which is designed to facilitate partnerships between Australian and African institutions, including in research, but not exclusively.

The idea is to help build a better understanding in Australia of the opportunities in Africa and vice versa. I would strongly encourage the University of Southern Queensland to take advantage of that program.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Graduates – this is really your day. I am really here to remind you that the world is now your oyster. You have prepared yourself for the opportunities and you have made the sorts of connections and networks that will hold you in good stead - both here in South Africa among your fellow students and through your links to Australia through the USQ.

I wish you all the very best as you go out there and do it!