



## **Australian High Commission, Pretoria**

**16 September 2009**

### **Australian Government Support for the National University of Lesotho HIV and AIDS Policy Capacity Building Project**

The Australian Government is proud to be a supporter of the National University of Lesotho project for the development and implementation of its HIV and AIDS Policy. The Australian Government's support is being provided through the Joint Economics AIDS and Poverty Programme (JEAPP), a long-term partner of the Australian Government since 2000.

Australia recognises the huge impact that the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to have across the globe, not least in sub-Saharan Africa. In February 2009, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs launched the Australian Government's new strategy on HIV (*Intensifying the response: Halting the spread of HIV*) which will guide Australia's international development assistance on the epidemic. It builds on the lessons learned and the significant changes that have taken place in the HIV arena since 2004 and focuses on six priorities:

- > intensifying HIV prevention
- > optimising the role of health services within HIV responses
- > strengthening coordination and capacity to scale up HIV responses
- > reviewing legal and policy frameworks to enable effective responses to HIV
- > building the evidence base for an effective HIV response
- > demonstrating and fostering leadership on HIV.

In Africa, the Australian Government's relationship with JEAPP has been a big part of our efforts in the HIV arena since 2000. In this time, JEAPP has technically overseen, commissioned and managed over 40 HIV and AIDS-related research and policy-related projects and activities. These activities have focused on contributing to policy and programme implementation in South Africa and importantly, since 2008, Lesotho.

The Australian Government is committed to increasing engagement with Africa through enhanced trade and commercial linkages, strengthened diplomatic relations and increased development assistance. And Australia's relationship with Lesotho continues to be an important part of our engagement in Africa.

Australia's relationship with Lesotho goes as far back as the early 1970s when Australia sponsored Basotho students to attend university in Australia under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

Since that time the Australian Government has supported over 120 Basotho students to study in Australia under various scholarship programs. And in 2010 we will be supporting a further nine Basotho students to travel to Australia and study a masters degree. Health and HIV/AIDS has been and continues to be a focus for these scholarships.

Past cooperation between Australia and Lesotho has also involved projects with the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Cooperatives and Marketing and the Ministry of Local Government. Recently, Australia supported the Lesotho Government to revise its Parliamentary Standing Rules and Orders and create a number of portfolio committees with mandates to hold public hearings. We have also supported capacity building of the Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission; supported the establishment of a national food security policy; and assisted Lesotho to improve capacity to design and implement programs to better address chronic food insecurity.

And in March 2007, the Australian Government launched a new Australian volunteer program in Lesotho. Links between Lesotho and Australia's volunteer program date back as far as 1975 when Australia placed four volunteers on two projects under the auspices of UN agencies. Today, there are four Australian volunteers living in Lesotho and working for local Lesotho organisations.

We congratulate the University of Lesotho for this important initiative and wish the University, its staff and its students every success. And we look forward to an ongoing and fruitful relationship with JEAPP and through this, engaging further with countries in the region on HIV and AIDS-related development issues.

Ann Harrap  
Australian High Commissioner