



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION SOUTH AFRICA

Remarks by Acting High Commissioner, Mr Peter Budd South African Premiere of “Samson and Delilah” Tuesday 24 November 2009

Ladies and Gentleman

I welcome you all, on behalf of the Australian High Commission in South Africa, to the South African premiere of the award-winning Australian film “Samson and Delilah”.

The film, a story of two Aboriginal teenagers amidst the challenges of living in central Australia, was written and directed by an indigenous Australian, Warwick Thornton.

It has swept the field with numerous awards in Australia and overseas, including six awards at the Inside Film Awards in Sydney, including Best Film, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director, People’s Choice Award and Best Music as well as at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year. The film is also Australia's nominee for the best foreign language film at the Oscars.

Part of the Australian High Commission’s mandate is to promote Australian culture in all its forms and encourage cultural exchange between Australian and South African artists, musicians and film-makers.

For example, earlier this year, the High Commission supported a visit by an Australian documentary film-maker, Ms Emma Franz, to South Africa for the Durban International Film Festival at which her documentary “Intangible Asset No. 82” won the best documentary award.

Australian and South African film-makers have worked together in the past with great success. In this context, I wanted to take this opportunity to let you know about potential future opportunities for Australian and South Africans to deepen their collaboration in film co-production. The Australian and South African governments have recently concluded negotiations on a treaty on film co-production, which will help facilitate Australians and South Africans to pool their creative and financial resources to create films.

Should you want to find out more about this, please don't hesitate to track me down after the film or contact the Australian High Commission in Pretoria.

We're certainly very excited to present "Samson and Delilah" here in South Africa – I'm sure the film will give a different impression of Australia to that which most South Africans are used to. And it underlines the challenges that Australia faces to redress the disadvantages experienced by many indigenous Australians – challenges not dissimilar to some of those South Africa is facing.

Following on from the historic apology in 2008 to the Stolen Generations – those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed from their families and their communities through the actions of past governments - the Australian Government has committed to "Closing the Gap" between the life opportunities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. To this end, the Australian Government has set specific and ambitious targets to end Indigenous disadvantage in life expectancy, health, education and employment.

Before I encourage you to sit back, relax and enjoy the film, I'd like to introduce Professor Mick Dodson, who is visiting South Africa this week, to say a few words about the Australian process of reconciliation. Professor Dodson is a well-known indigenous Australian leader.

Described by Australian Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd, as 'a courageous fighter for reconciliation and for closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians', Professor Dodson was presented the award of Australian of the Year in recognition of his lifetime commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal people and promoting understanding between all Australians.

Professor Dodson, a Yawuru man from the Broome area of Western Australia, has held many roles as an indigenous advocate at community level, with governments, the United Nations and academia, including as:

- Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission;
- the current Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia;
- the Director of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University;
- and currently working with the Federal government on a new national Indigenous representative body.

So without further ado, I introduce Professor Mick Dodson to make a few brief remarks before we watch the film.

Thank you.