



## **AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION PRETORIA**

---

### **University of Newcastle Graduation Recognition Ceremony for Graduates from Botswana**

**11.00am on Saturday 12 SEPTEMBER 2009  
GABORONE SUN  
BOTSWANA**

---

**Remarks by William Blomfield, Third Secretary  
Australian High Commission in South Africa – also accredited to Angola,  
Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland**

Mr Golekanye Setume, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education;  
Professor Nicholas Saunders, Vice Chancellor and President, the University of  
Newcastle;  
Government of Botswana representatives;  
Ambassadors and other diplomatic colleagues;  
Representatives of Botswana Universities and colleges;  
Successful graduates, proud parents and distinguished guests.

Dumelang!

I would like to pass on the apologies of the Australian High Commissioner to Botswana, Her Excellency Ms Ann Harrap, who would have liked to have been here today. Ms Harrap is currently returning to southern Africa after attending two conferences aimed at increasing Australian investment in Africa – but more on that later.

It is my honour and privilege to be with you here today. It is a proud occasion – as a relatively recent graduate of an Australian university, I know how much hard work and effort goes into successfully completing tertiary studies.

Congratulations!

And like many of us here today, I also know about the valuable friendships and links that are made during one's university years. For the Botswana here today who have lived the 'Australian experience' and studied at the University of

Newcastle, I hope you had many positive experiences in Australia and made many friends for life.

### **Batswana students in Australia**

Some years ago, the Government of Botswana decided to send many of its ablest young people to Australia to study. This is an honour that Botswana has chosen to send its best and brightest to Australia to upgrade their skills. Australia has benefited from their presence; so we hope too has Botswana.

It has meant for me that one of the unexpected pleasures in coming to Botswana – this is my 6<sup>th</sup> official trip in just over 16 months – has been the first-hand knowledge that many Batswana have of Australia – I can assure you I was as surprised as anyone to hear for the first time “G’day mate” in Botswana.

But when you see the numbers of Batswana students who have benefited from study in Australia over the years, it is understandable.

And the University of Newcastle has been at the forefront of this effort - around 600 Batswana have benefited from the high-class education offered there since 2002. And just over twelve months ago, the University of Newcastle launched its PhD scholarship program here in Botswana.

Australia is a destination of choice for many international students seeking a high-quality education. We welcome tens of thousands of students from more than 190 countries every year.

Australia is committed to providing a high-quality education experience – our universities are world class. And Australia seeks to provide international students with the support they need while studying in the land ‘down under’.

These international students make an enormous contribution to Australia’s multicultural diversity, the academic life of our institutions and contribute to stronger people-to-people linkages across the world.

It is these people-to-people linkages that are one significant driving factor in international relations.

And in the case of Botswana, students have been at the heart of the growing links between Australia and Botswana. But it is not only Batswana students from Africa – there are around 9000 students from all over Africa each year that study in Australia.

### **Australia’s strengthened engagement with Africa**

The Federal Labour Government, in power since November 2007, has sought to strengthen its engagement with the countries, institutions and peoples of Africa.

People-to-people links, particularly through students and institutions such as the University of Newcastle, was certainly one of the factors driving what is a major shift in Australia’s policy towards Africa.

Of course, there are other excellent reasons why the Australian Government decided to make this policy shift.

It starts from the understanding, in the words of the Australian Foreign Minister only last week that “[i]n the past, Australia has not given Africa the priority it requires and deserves.”

While Australian companies had well and truly discovered the continent, there was a sense that Government had lagged behind our growing trade and investment and people-to-people links. So this also helped drive the reassessment of our policy.

Australia also thinks it important that we make a contribution to accelerate Africa’s progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

And another important reason has to do with the Government’s commitment to multilateralism, which is a key pillar of our foreign policy. In our view, the challenges facing today’s world such as international development, conflict prevention, food security and climate change require global solutions.

Australia is committed to supporting the vital role of multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, in meeting these challenges. With 53 countries in Africa, the continent has an important global role and, as such, it is vital that Australia deepens its cooperation with the countries and institutions of Africa.

And the Australian Government has been working hard over the past 18 months to strengthen our engagement. I know, because I’ve been at the coalface of this effort!

### **Strengthened high-level engagement**

The first indicator of this strengthened engagement has been a notable increase in high-level engagement.

In January this year the Australian Foreign Minister attended the African Union summit in Addis Ababa – the first Australian Foreign Minister ever to do so. While there he met over 30 African foreign ministers and addressed the Executive Council of the AU.

His visit was followed up a month later by that of the Australian Defence Minister, who went to Addis to discuss African peace and security and future Australian defence cooperation.

Then in March this year, the Australian Governor-General (our head of state) visited 10 countries in Africa – the first visit by an Australian Head of State to Africa in over 30 years, including a tremendous visit to Botswana.

In the past six (6) months, we have had five (5) African Foreign Ministers visit Australia as guests of the Australian Government, including the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Botswana, Mr Phandu Skelemani MP in June. The Mozambican Foreign Minister is in Australia as I speak.

In other words, the political level contact between Australia and African countries is the best it has been for a long time.

But while part of Australia's enhanced engagement with Africa is about increasing the political and diplomatic level contact, it is also about putting real substance into the relationships that we have with Africa as a whole, through the African Union, and those we have at the bilateral level.

The Australian Foreign Minister has identified three priority areas of engagement for Australia:

- to support Africa's efforts to promote economic growth and prosperity through investment and trade;
- to accelerate Africa's progress towards the achievement of its Millennium Development Goals; and
- to address Africa's peace and security challenges.

### **Increased trade and investment**

Australia's trade and investment footprint in Africa is a substantial one, particularly in the resources sector. From gold in the Democratic Republic of Congo to platinum in South Africa, from copper in Zambia to coal in Botswana – there are currently around 300 Australian companies with an estimated US\$20 billion worth of current and prospective investments in Africa.

Australian companies are active in nearly 30 countries across the continent, including a number in Botswana. And Australia's merchandise trade with Africa has grown at an impressive annual average rate of over 10 per cent over the past decade.

But there is still much more that can be done, which is why there is a focus on strengthening support for Australian business on the ground in Africa.

Austrade has recently opened offices in Ghana and Kenya to cover West and East Africa respectively, with a strong focus on mining.

And the High Commissioner has just been in Australia at two major conferences focused specifically on building on Australian investment in Africa - the Africa Down Under conference in Perth focused on the resources industry and a more broadly focused Australia-Africa Business Council event.

The FIFA World Cup in 2010, with Australian Socceroos now qualified, will offer excellent opportunities to enhance our trade and investment relationship and for Australian businesses to explore the southern African, and more broadly, the African market.

The Australian government, through Business Club Australia, is looking to facilitate business networking opportunities around the event, just as we have done during other major sporting events, such as the Beijing Olympics and the Rugby World Cup.

### **Millennium Development Goals**

Accelerating progress in Africa towards the Millennium Development Goals is also important to Australia, as demonstrated by the increase in our development assistance program to Africa, which will increase by 40 per cent to over A\$160 million in 2009-10.

Australia recognises that we will never be the biggest donor in Africa, but the Australian Government believes we can assist Africa in its long term development in areas where our expertise and experience can make a unique and positive contribution - in areas such as food security and agriculture, maternal and child health and water and sanitation.

A principal area of focus of Australia's development assistance program is capacity building through tertiary education.

Australia recognises that many countries in Africa face serious skills challenges. Addressing these human resource capacity constraints is crucial to Africa's future.

In this context, Australia is certainly trying to do its bit. Australia has provided more than 3,600 tertiary scholarships to Africa since 1960. While at the African Union summit in Addis Ababa earlier this year, the Australian foreign minister announced that Australia would increase by 10-fold the number of scholarships it offers to African students - from 100 each year last year, to 1000 each year by 2012-2013.

And so as to effectively respond to the needs of African countries - those scholarships will be a combination of both longer-term post-graduate scholarships as well as shorter term awards and work placements.

### **University of Newcastle efforts in Africa**

In this context of a ten-fold increase in Australian Government funded scholarships, it is also important to credit the significant role that Australian institutions are already playing in Africa to build skills capacity. One of the leading institutions in this regard is of course the University of Newcastle.

I understand that the University of Newcastle has been active now in Botswana for ten years now, and as I mentioned earlier, around 600 Botswana have studied at the University of Newcastle since 2002. The University has granted a significant number of bursaries and scholarships for Botswana students.

But the University of Newcastle's role is not limited to educating Botswana in Australia. The University of Newcastle has been active in building capacity here in Botswana as well, including through:

- the capacity building of staff of the new College of Technical Vocational Education and Training;
- Working with Botswana on staff capacity building;
- Working with the University of Botswana on curriculum development and capacity building; and
- Assisting the development of a new Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST), amongst others.

Nor is the University of Newcastle's role limited to Botswana. Around 1600 southern African students have studied at the University since 2002 and the University has partnerships and associations with institutions such as the University of Cape Town, the University of Pretoria, the Walter Sisulu University and the University of Fort Hare.

And beyond South Africa and Botswana, the University of Newcastle also does work in other countries in Africa such as Kenya, Uganda, Swaziland and Lesotho.

I am confident that the growing engagement between the University of Newcastle and Botswana, and more broadly in Africa, will continue to pay significant dividends and help drive a better future for the people of Africa.

### **Australian Relations with Botswana**

In this context of strengthened engagement with Africa, I am pleased to say that the links between Australia and Botswana are going from strength to strength.

Botswana and Australia of course have many similarities and this partly explains our warm relations: large land masses with small populations; scarcity of water; prosperity based on the land – minerals and agriculture; and a future based on enhancing the skills of our peoples.

A little over twelve months ago at the University of Newcastle PhD program launch here, the former Australian High Commissioner characterised the relationship as not only a warm and strong friendship, but a 'solid partnership'.

And these past twelve months have seen the relationship fulfil that promise and become even more substantive.

As I mentioned earlier, the Governor General had a wonderful visit to Botswana earlier this year.

Australia was pleased to welcome the Botswana Minister for Foreign Affairs during his positive visit to Australia in June this year, when he officially opened the Botswana High Commission in Canberra. The visit followed a meeting between our Foreign Ministers in Addis Ababa at the African Union Executive Council meeting of Foreign Ministers.

Bilateral areas of engagement are diverse but focused on the practical. They range from bushfire fighting capacity-building to improving meat and livestock practices, dry land farming and rail safety. We have opened mines in Botswana, shared expertise on difficult peace and security issues in Africa and built capacity in the Botswana Defence Force on peacekeeping; we've helped progress plans to introduce a law reform commission, as well as build the capacity of Botswana to introduce a planned quarantine regulatory system.

Many Botswana delegations have visited Australia in recent years, and come back with new and practical ways to enhance the lives of the people of Botswana.

Many of these areas of engagement have grown from people-to-people links.

And the Foreign Ministers have agreed that our relationship has the potential to grow further. The Ministers agreed that a plan of action should be built to identify areas where the relationship can be enhanced further.

One new area that we're looking at is assistance on building the capacity of Botswana's law enforcement agencies, through the Australian Federal Police and Australia's law enforcement agencies.

And the levels of investment in Botswana from Australia's mineral resources, tourism, agriculture and agribusiness industries can be enhanced.

With the expansion of the scholarship program, there will also likely be some increase in the scholarships for Botswana.

When it comes to many international issues, we're also very like-minded – we are both strong regional activists and multilateralists. From natural resource governance, to climate change, to regional instability in Africa - Australia and Botswana frequently share perspectives and are able to work together in international forums such as the Commonwealth, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations, amongst others.

Australia has admired, from afar, the very strong and principled stand that Botswana has taken on Zimbabwe, and we are looking at ways of working together to support Zimbabwe in its recovery.

And we continue to be impressed by the approach of Botswana to issues of governance.

## **Conclusion**

Africa's importance for Australia is growing, through business, education and people-to-people links.

The Australian Government, for its part, is committed to strengthening these links further, both as a friend and a partner.

And in line with this enhanced engagement, Australia's relationship with Botswana is growing. The University of Newcastle is an important thread in this increasingly multi-faceted relationship between Australia and Botswana.

As Australia builds on these links, we look forward to partnering with the University of Newcastle and Botswana to contribute Australian expertise and experience to the development, security and prosperity of Africa.

University of Newcastle – Pula!  
Australia – Pula!  
Botswana – Pula!