



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION

PRETORIA

University of Newcastle

Graduation Recognition Ceremony

for Graduates from Botswana

12.00pm on Sunday 13 SEPTEMBER 2009
SHERATON PRETORIA HOTEL
SOUTH AFRICA

Remarks by Pete Budd, Acting High Commissioner

Australian High Commission in South Africa – also accredited to Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland

Professor Nicholas Saunders, Vice Chancellor and President, the University of Newcastle;

Government of South Africa representatives;

Ambassadors and other diplomatic colleagues;

Representatives of South African Universities and colleges;

Successful graduates and distinguished guests.

Sawubona

I would like to pass on the apologies of the Australian High Commissioner to South Africa, 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.

It is my honour and privilege to be with you here today. It is a proud occasion and this ceremony recognising here today what you, as graduates today, is well-deserved. As a fellow graduate of an Australian university, many years ago, I know how much hard work and effort goes into successfully completing tertiary

studies. Regrettably, my studies are now receding into distant memory but I recall them fondly.

So my heart-felt 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 Graduates 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.

As a diplomat, I recognise that people-to-people relationships are the bread and butter of any bilateral relationship. And it is clear that there are more and more South Africans and Australians interacting than ever before – through business, education and sport.

Strong people-to-people links are vital to addressing shared challenges which we are pursuing from the very highest levels. Only yesterday Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd spoke with President Zuma on the phone to discuss how Australia and South Africa can work together through the G20 process to address problems that face us all, from the Global economic crisis to climate change.

Australian Relations with South Africa

In terms of Australia and South Africa, we are building on an already solid foundation derived from our people to people links and common perspectives:

- historically, we both experienced British colonisation and, although we inherited many British institutions, such as parliament, we have both developed these to suit our own unique circumstances;
- we share a fundamental commitment to democracy and good governance;
- we are countries with a common history of migration and multiculturalism;
- our economies are highly dependent on commodities and have suffered in the past from the tyranny of distance from many important world markets, although this is changing;
- we share similarities in the roles we play in our respective regions - South Africa in its near neighbourhood; Australia in the South West Pacific; and
- we share overwhelming similarities in climate and landscape, not to mention the lifestyle and sporting interests that bring countless points of contact between our two countries.

It is partly this commonality of experiences that means we often share close perspectives and similar strategic interests on a wide range of regional and global issues. Hence the very positive discussion between our two Leaders yesterday which is a tangible demonstration of Australia's commitment to strengthened political engagement with South Africa and the African continent as a whole.

Strengthened high-level engagement

Yesterday's discussion builds on the efforts of the new Australian Government over the past 18 months. 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.

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.

In the past six (6) months, we have had five (5) African Foreign Ministers visit Australia as guests of the Australian Government. The Mozambican Foreign Minister is in Australia as I speak.

During a brief stop in South Africa last month, Foreign Minister Smith met the ANC Treasurer General. Dr Mathews Phosa and noted the importance of strengthening Australia's political engagement, to better represent the already-strong people-to-people links.

In the past, Australia's political engagement with Africa has, speaking frankly, been underdone. But it is not helpful to allow any perceptions that Australia is ignoring Africa: it does not align with the realities of our strong people-to-people links, Australia's policy approach or, as I've said, the interests we share in common that require us to work together.

Like South Africa, the Australian Government is committed 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.

On issues such as climate change, support for free trade in agriculture, United Nations reform, nuclear disarmament and the importance of the Millennium Development Goals, Australia and South Africa are largely on the same page.

In the past six months in particular, Australia and South Africa have taken many similar perspectives and objectives on the international response to the global economic crisis to the G20 meetings in Washington and London and our Leaders will be carrying these through to Pittsburg this month.

We have both pushed reform of international financial institutions to make them more representative of the new global dynamic. We have done this particularly through our work together as co-chairs of the G20 working group on the reform of the International Monetary Fund. That work has helped to drive progress on

the international response to the global downturn and has demonstrated the punch of our collective weight.

A strengthened sense of collaboration

Bilaterally, these broad similarities between our two countries have meant we have found it easy to develop a range of mutual assistance and other treaty-level agreements which are designed to improve the lives of our citizens, make doing business easier and help grow our trading relationships – these agreements range from double taxation, to film co-production to air services.

In more recent years we have sought to find additional areas of collaboration for our common benefit. For example, our common reliance on coal as an energy source as well as the reality of the serious potential impacts of climate change on both of our countries means we are working constructively together in a climate change partnership.

Australia and South Africa are both founding members of the Global Institute for Carbon Capture and Storage which means we both recognise the importance of more research into new technologies to make our businesses cleaner and more efficient.

There is an existing strong dynamic to the relationship. This is bolstered by a strong trade and investment partnership and growing people to people links.

Our trade has grown steadily in recent years such that it is now worth close to 25 billion Rand each year. Sixty (60) per cent or so of South Africa's exports to Australia are motor vehicles. Many of the motor vehicles driven on Australian roads – the Mercedes C class, VW Polo, BMW 3 series and Toyota Corolla's – are made here in South Africa.

African students in Australia

Given these links, it is perhaps natural that Australia is a destination of choice for many African students seeking a high-quality education.

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'.

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 South Africa students have been at the heart of the growing links with Australia: there are around 9000 students from all over Africa each year that study in Australia.

Millennium Development Goals

Education is also a key element of Australia's support for 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.

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.

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.

The University of Newcastle has been active in building capacity in Southern Africa, particularly South Africa and neighbouring 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 South Africa, and more broadly in Africa, will continue to pay significant dividends and help drive a better future for the people of Africa.

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 those links further, both as a friend and a partner.

And in line with this enhanced engagement, institutions such as the University of Newcastle is an important thread of our multi-faceted relationship and our commitment to the development, security and prosperity of Africa.

Thankyou.