



**Speech by Chis Munn, Charge d’Affaires, Australian High Commission**

at launch of photographic exhibition titled

**“Celebrating 20 Years of Democracy:  
Australia’s Contribution to the New South Africa”**

Edoardo Villa Museum, University of Pretoria, 15 October 2014

On behalf of the Australian High Commission I would like to welcome you all to the official opening of what I believe is a very dignified and appropriate contribution from the Australian High Commission to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first South Africa democratic government. Before I continue, please let me acknowledge the following attendees who have given up their Wednesday evening to be here, as well as those who have contributed to and supported the exhibition:

- The Hon Ms Susan Shabangu, Minister of Women in the Presidency
- Professor Cheryl de la Rey, Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria and our wonderful host for the exhibition
- Officials from the South African Government, including the Department of Arts and Culture, from whom we sought and received invaluable advice and assistance during the exhibition planning phase
- I would like to mention that Ambassador Eddy Funde (the ANC’s first chief representative to Australia from 1983 had intended to be here this evening but cannot. I welcome all our friends from the African National Congress present
- Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, HE Bene M’Poko
- Dean of the Asian Group of the Diplomatic Corps HE Mr Bernard Baker
- All Heads of Diplomatic Missions and invited diplomats
- Our principal sponsor, Rio Tinto, represented by Mr David Stone, Regional Economic Development Manager

- Our other sponsor, Challenger Energy represented by Mr Pierre Joubert
- Professor de la Rey's excellent team here at the University of Pretoria including but not limited to
- Mr Gerard de Kamper
- Mr Chris de Klerk
- Mr Daniel Mosako
- And, of course the wonderful University of Pretoria African Dance Troupe
- Mr John Robbie, Talk 702 Presenter and a good friend of the High Commission
- Staff and students of the University of Pretoria
- Mr Angus Leendertz, of the Australasian South Africa Alliance, our curator in Australia although he is not with us this evening.
- Ms Sanet du Plessis, our Pretoria-based designer (and hero)
- All those I haven't mentioned by name who generously provided content, advice and brawn to help the exhibition
- Representatives of other Australian companies in South Africa and Australian friends in South Africa and South African partners who are part of the effort of strengthening the already very close friendship and extensive links between our two countries, of which I will say more later

Welcome to the official opening of the second of the two Australian offerings to help commemorate and celebrate the very important 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Democracy for the people of the Republic of South Africa. I hesitate to give too much detail on our first contribution, which involved the Third Test match in Cape Town earlier this year. Suffice it to say that the sporting rivalry between our two great sporting countries remains very much alive and as all good sports men and women are aware, one day you win and one day you lose, but the important thing is to play the game.

Before I begin my discourse, I would like to say a few words on why the Australian High Commission took the exceptionally difficult decision in early September to postpone the opening of the exhibition.

As you all know, Graeme Wilson, Australia's High Commissioner passed away on the second of September. He passed away unexpectedly after being discharged from a stay in

hospital of over two months. He should have been here in my place to open this exhibition because, if the exhibition had a father, it would have been Graeme.

Graeme's vision was to help commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Democracy in South Africa with something appropriate. He wanted something which recognised the enormous struggle of the South African people in overcoming a cruel and inhumane system of government and replacing it with a tolerant liberal democracy which provided rights for all South Africans, including minorities.

In addition to recognising the South African struggle, he wanted to highlight the efforts of successive Australian Governments as well as the Australian people in support of the struggle. We couldn't in all honesty open this exhibition without Graeme, at least without a decent period to double and triple check that if he were here today he would be 100% satisfied with what we had been tasked with.

Graeme – as you tried to teach us - we have dotted every I and crossed every T and we think that you would have been happy with the result.

We have dedicated tonight to your memory. I am hoping that in a few moments John Robbie will say a few words about Graeme, who is dearly missed.

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous efforts by Pamela Currie, her predecessor Natalie Mendelsohn who is back in Australia, Will Butler, Larissa Subira, Irma Dyssel and many others from the High Commission who have made this fantastic exhibition possible. Thank you and congratulations - the result is excellent and a fine tribute to you all.

As most, if not all of us here this evening would agree within reason, regardless of party political sympathies, 2014 has been a landmark anniversary with many opportunities for South Africans to reflect on and honestly assess and analyse the achievements of post-apartheid administrations.

In 20 years of democracy, South Africa has had five elections for its national parliament and there have been three Presidents and one interim President in that time.

Twenty years on, how do we as foreigners, resident in South Africa, see the end of the apartheid era?

Looking back on the horrors and wrongs of the last century, apartheid holds a unique place in the global imagination and memory.

Without question, the struggle against apartheid was one of the great moral challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

A system of state-driven racism, discrimination and disempowerment was brought to an end, after decades of resistance.

So, apart from a democratic vote, what has the end of apartheid come to mean?

For ordinary South Africans – it has meant an opportunity to engage in the economic, social and political life of their country.

And the right for all to play a part in designing their future.

These are rights every single person in our world deserves to enjoy.

South Africa has made extraordinary progress, in the 20 years we are marking through this exhibition.

This is not progress without falter, of course.

The legacy of centuries of dispossession and exclusion was never going to be excised in the space of two decades.

Economic, social and political challenges cannot be easily overcome.

In 2014, however, it is wonderful to see how far South Africa has progressed, though of course significant challenges remain.

And yet, in the broader, global context, what does the end of apartheid mean?

Sadly it has not, as we know, meant the end of racism.

It has not meant the end of state-sponsored discrimination.

Regrettably, it has not even meant full equality of opportunity.

However, the end of apartheid represents something even wider than the historic triumph of non-white South Africans over a racist legal structure.

It represents the fact that triumph against injustice is possible.

This message is still deeply relevant today.

Around the world today, people still take comfort from that extraordinary election, 20 years ago this year.

President Mandela's elevation, only four short years after his release from prison, remains one of the most potent symbols of justice and valour of our time.

### **Australia's role in the anti-apartheid movement**

Australia remains proud of the part that we played in helping to end apartheid.

That battle was, without doubt, primarily won here in South Africa.

But in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, one of the other remarkable aspects of the fight against apartheid was its international character.

The Commonwealth played a vital role.

Support mobilised in many quarters of good conscience.

And Australia was one of the driving forces in the Commonwealth and in the wider international community.

For us, this was a struggle that transcended the usual partisanship of our politics as exemplified by the actions of successive Prime Ministers from both major parties, that is both the Labor and Liberal Parties.

In 1972, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced sporting teams selected on the basis of race would be prohibited from entering Australia.

In 1976, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser supported the United Nations General Assembly resolution on apartheid in sport.

And in 1977, Malcolm Fraser was a strong supporter of the Commonwealth's Gleneagles Agreement, which called for a boycott of racially-selected sporting teams.

In October 1983, Prime Minister Bob Hawke announced a further tightening of sporting contacts, set up scholarships for non-white South Africans to study in Australia, and welcomed prominent apartheid opponents.

In 1985, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Commonwealth's Eminent Persons Group, comprised of former Prime Minister Fraser and other former Commonwealth leaders, to press the regime for change.

After visiting black townships and hostels, Fraser described conditions as a 'disgrace to humanity' and noted how there had been 'only one other regime in this century as racist as this'.

He urged the release of political prisoners, notably Nelson Mandela, whose first question to Fraser when he met him was whether cricketing legend Donald Bradman was still alive.

Fraser openly clashed with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan, both of whom claimed that economic sanctions were “immoral”. I’m not sure that their views on sanctions at that time will fall on the right side of history.

In taking such a hard line, Fraser reiterated the instrumental role he had played in negotiating the shift to black majority rule in Zimbabwe in the late 1970s.

On Fraser’s recommendations, the Hawke government introduced bans on new investments and loans.

The Australian Trade Commissioner was withdrawn from Johannesburg.

Then Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, who was later one of the first international figures to meet with Madiba in February 1990 in Lusaka immediately after his release from jail, championed targeted financial sanctions that was eventually the catalyst for change.

Australian sanctions were extended in December 1986 and a ban imposed on the import of coal, iron, steel and agricultural products from South Africa.

Between 1983 and 1987 imports declined by 14 per cent and exports by 26 per cent.

As we know, ultimately, sanctions – once they had also been imposed by the United States and Britain – bit hard.

Helping to force President de Klerk to the negotiating table.

I really don’t mean to overstate Australia’s contribution.

As I say, the battle against apartheid was won squarely here in South Africa.

But Australia remains proud of our contribution.

When President Mandela visited Australia in October 1990, after his release from prison, he told a crowd of tens of thousands of people at the Sydney Opera House that he could “feel the solidarity of Australians and others for 27 years through thick prison walls”.

He said “we prisoners of apartheid whispered to each other about your healthy and militant action of disavowal against an all-white Springbok team”.

In 1994, the Australian Electoral Commission, along with electoral commissions from many countries around the world played an active role in helping to facilitate those first democratic elections, including through supporting the Commonwealth and UN observer missions and providing technical support to the Independent Electoral Commission.

### **Australia and South Africa today**

In 2014, Australia remains by South Africa’s side.

The nature of our collaboration has, of course, changed, as our relationship has flourished in the post-apartheid era.

We have a vibrant trade and investment relationship.

South Africa is, by far, Australia’s largest export market in the region.

In 2013, our two-way trade represented about 27 per cent of Australia’s total African trade.

The investment relationship is also significant – something around \$6 billion in 2013, of which about \$1.8 billion was South African investment in Australia.

We share important similarities in terms of the composition of our economies.



We both have large, export-oriented resource sectors and sophisticated agriculture and services sectors.

Over the past 20 years, Australia and South Africa have cooperated at the multilateral level on many issues including in the United Nations with peacekeeping, disarmament, environmental protection and fisheries management.

Through the Kimberley Process, we have worked closely together to prevent the sale of conflict diamonds.

Through the WTO, and in particular, as members of the WTO Cairns Group, we have worked to overcome unfair distortions in agricultural trade.

We also share many common values and interests as members of the Commonwealth, G20 and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

The future of our collaboration is even brighter.

Let me mention some of the great ways we are and will be working together in the future.

Our on-going program of Australia Award scholarships will offer around 550 awards for sub-Saharan students for the next year (2014-15).

Over the years, we've given 138 master-level scholarships to students from South Africa and hundreds of others in short course awards, and into the future this will be a great way in which we can work together.

The Australian International Centre for Agricultural Research, is working here in collaboration with the Agriculture Research Council and with South African smallholder farmers to make it easier for beef producers to get their high quality product to market.

That's a very valuable area in which we can collaborate.

And of course, there's perhaps the most exciting project of them all, the Square Kilometre Array.

This is a truly ground-breaking astronomical research program, that will, in future years, be involved in new scientific discoveries and a forging deeper understanding of our universe.

And moreover it will be located in South Africa and Australia.

What an outstanding future opportunity for our two countries to work together.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen, Australia and modern South Africa have many ties – history, culture, sport, trade, investment, arts and culture.

But perhaps the most fundamental thing we share is something more intangible than many of those things.

What has happened in this country, over the two decades since the end of apartheid, is that democracy and human rights have taken firm root.

The desire for an open, true democracy was always there.

We know that all people, wherever they live in the world want a say in how they live their lives.

But the apartheid system that ran South Africa between 1948 and 1994 denied people access to democracy, denied South Africans their human rights.

Since then, South Africans of all colours have shown that – given the opportunity – they are as keen proponents of democracy and human rights as anyone.

For our part, these are values that Australia is proud to share.

Let me end with one of my favourite quotes from Allan Paton's Cry the Beloved Country. This was a novel that I read at school as a teenager as part of our curriculum, and when I had finished I was left confused and upset about a country I knew nothing about. But it was a place that I wanted to know much more about.

Paton's message from that novel is still one which should still ring true for us all:

*Pain and suffering, they are a secret. Kindness and love, they are a secret.*

*But I have learned that kindness and love can pay for pain and suffering.*

Thank you.