

Nelson Mandela Foundation Roundtable – Rachel Perkins
DHOM Remarks – 20 April 2017

Welcome and let me add my thanks to all of you for attending today's roundtable. My name is Ben Playle and I'm the Australian Deputy High Commissioner to South Africa.

I'm particularly grateful to the Nelson Mandela Foundation for partnering with the Australian High Commission and hosting us this afternoon. Many thanks to Sello, Lunga and all of their colleagues.

We at the Australian High Commission have been proud to make a contribution to the Foundation over the past few years through our Australian Volunteers for International Development program and through grants from our Direct Aid Program.

Our contribution has focussed on the digitisation of the materials held by the Foundation relating to Nelson Mandela's 46664 campaign to combat HIV/AIDS. After Tenille Hands, an Australian volunteer from our National Film and Sound Archive, got the digitisation project off the ground in 2015, I'm pleased to say that another Australian volunteer will shortly commence a one year placement at the Foundation to continue Tenille's work.

We are also proud that our guest of honour today, Rachel Perkins, accepted the Australian High Commission's invitation to visit South Africa for the first time. It's a great pleasure to have you in Jo'burg for a few days as part of an African tour that will also include stops in Addis, Accra, Abuja and Harare.

Rachel has spent more than 25 years telling the stories of Indigenous Australians, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through film. Her work has helped Australian audiences from all walks of life better understand and interpret both our history, and the relationship between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, warts and all.

When it comes to the warts, we have to be honest that there have been some shameful moments in the treatment of Indigenous Australians by non-indigenous Australians, and that plenty of warts remain today, despite the best efforts of successive governments and communities alike to ensure reconciliation. Rachel and others like her have played an invaluable role in holding a mirror up to our society, offering a previously suppressed, indigenous perspective on our nation's story.

Today, you may be surprised to hear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprise just three per cent of Australia's population. Yet, together, their cultures constitute the oldest living cultural history in the world, dating back at least 50,000 years, and possibly as far back as 65,000 years. They are a source of pride for all Australians.

While I generally don't like introducing someone with reference to their family members, and Rachel certainly stands on her own two feet, it would be remiss of me in this setting not to mention that her father, Charlie Perkins, was at the forefront of the Aboriginal civil rights movement from four decades from the 1960s onwards.

He was of a generation of Aboriginal civil rights activists who took inspiration from the stalwarts of the anti-apartheid struggle. While the links between American and South African civil rights leaders are well recognised, the links between Australian and South African civil rights leaders are less so.

We opened an Australian Indigenous film festival here in Jo'burg last year with a documentary called *The Redfern Story*. I confess that this particular film was directed not by Rachel, but by another Aboriginal filmmaker, Darlene Johnson. The film included interviews with Aboriginal leaders from the 1960s and 1970s. When they referred to Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo, there were audible gasps among the audience in the theatre.

In this context, when we learned that Rachel was able to accept our invitation to visit South Africa, the Nelson Mandela Foundation immediately sprung to mind as an ideal partner for an event, given its standing as a respected site of dialogue, memory and learning. And we were very pleased to find ourselves pushing against an open door when we contacted our friends here at the Foundation.

Like South Africa, Australia faces the challenges of recognising and learning from past injustices, healing those wounds, and ensuring that everyone in our society has a voice. Like South Africa, we have made significant strides in relatively recent times, but there remains much to do. While it would be naïve to say that our two countries' stories are the same, there are common themes that we can usefully explore, and that require frank dialogue. That is exactly what we hope to spark

this afternoon: open dialogue, an exchange of ideas, and the sharing of insights and experiences with film as a tool to explore identity.

I'm obliged to end with a shameless plug. If you would like to see more of Rachel's work, together with films by other prominent Indigenous Australians, then we are hosting another film festival this weekend. The 'storylines' film festival will be held at the Bioscope Theatre in Maboneng on 22 and 23 April. There are free public screenings at 3.00, 5.00 and 7.00 pm each day. You can find a program and reserve seats online at www.thebioscope.co.za. We hope to see you there. Thank you.

Running order

12h00	Rachel and Abby to arrive for Foundation tour
13h00	Guests arrive, mingle, and have something to eat
13h20	Welcome by Lunga Nene (NMF)
	Ben Playle speaks (+/- 5 mins)
	Lunga Nene introduces how the event will be run and the other respondents
13h45	2 film excerpts - First Australians and Redfern Now
14h00	5 minute screening of Coloured Mentality clip
14h05	Rachel Perkins remarks
14h25	Respondents speak: Sarah Summers and Kelly-Eve Koopman
15h00	Lunga Nene facilitates Q&A discussion
16h00	Event ends