

Cheshire Homes of Swaziland
Launch of the
Swaziland Wheelchair Basketball Project
11 October 2017
HOM Speech

Good morning everyone

Ladies and gentlemen

- I will aim this morning to share some experiences of how the Australian Government seeks to empower persons with disabilities, both at home through our National Disability Strategy; and abroad through our foreign policy and development programs. In both cases, our efforts are underpinned by our ratification of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* in 2008.

- Disability is a part of human diversity. Indeed people with disabilities are the world's largest minority, constituting around 15 per cent of the global population, and about 20 per cent of Australia's. People with disabilities are also among the world's most disadvantaged minorities, who are disproportionately represented among the world's poor. We know that the majority of people are likely to experience some form of disability at some stage in their life.

- Be it themselves, through a family member, a friend or even a colleague
- It follows that no society, including here in Swaziland or in my home of Australia, can be at its best unless it recognises and harnesses the talents and abilities of its citizens with disabilities. By failing to take advantage of all its citizens, a society diminishes itself, undermining its own cohesion and limiting its own economic growth.
- Accordingly, the Australian Government's policies are geared towards including people with disabilities, and giving them every opportunity to contribute to society, commensurate with their often very substantial abilities.
- At home, the Council of Australian Governments, which brings together the equivalents of the national and provincial governments in Swaziland, endorsed our first ten year National Disability Strategy in 2011. This marked an historic milestone, establishing a coordinated plan to improve the lives not only of people with disabilities themselves, but also their families and carers.
- The Strategy is based on the belief that all Australians should have fair and equal access to the full range of mainstream programs and services, whether those programs relate to employment, education, healthcare, transport, access to justice, or a host of other issues.

- The Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop, released the *Development for All 2015-2020 Strategy* on 25 May 2015. The Strategy was informed by consultations with disabled people's organisations and other stakeholders in our region. Among other things, it emphasises the importance of the aid program supporting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream development efforts to ensure that broader systems, policies and services benefit them as much as anyone else.
- Consistent with our National Disability Strategy, the Development For All Strategy recognises that everyone is affected if the most disadvantaged people are left behind. In other words, ensuring our aid investments include people with disabilities is not only good development practice, but also boosts sustainable economic growth and creates better development outcomes for all.
- Australia will continue to strengthen its efforts to identify and remove barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating in and benefiting from development programs. Among other things, we will work to make physical infrastructure, and water and sanitation, accessible for all. We are also prioritising accessible, quality education so no one is left behind.

- Consistent with the approach in our own aid program, Australia is also engaged in multilateral efforts to encourage the international community writ large to prioritise the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- With the International Disability Alliance, Australia is a co-Chair of the Global Action on Disability Network. We are particularly proud of this role, which acknowledges our international reputation as a leading proponent of development that includes persons with disabilities.
- Bringing this back to Swaziland, Australia runs aid programs here that benefit people with disabilities, including our Direct Aid Program, which offers small grants to civil society organisations also on a competitive basis; and our Australian Volunteers for International Development program, which, as the name suggests, places volunteers in civil society organisations.
- The Australian High Commission has also used our Direct Aid Program (DAP) to prioritise funding for civil society organisations in Swaziland which support the inclusion of people with disabilities. Of particular note for this audience, we are proud to have funded the *Swaziland Wheelchair Basketball Project*.
- I understand that the project is the first of its kind targeting adults and young people with physical

disabilities to improve their lives, raise awareness and promote positive understanding of disability.

- At its core, ensuring that development includes people with disabilities is a straightforward, non-negotiable matter of respecting human rights and dignity. We have seen much improvement, including in Swaziland and Australia alike, but equally there is much left to do. Cheshire Homes Swaziland is certainly doing its bit to ensure that people with disabilities are included and empowered. We at the Australian High Commission are proud to partner with you, and look forward to remaining a reliable friend to Cheshire Homes Swaziland going forward.

Thank you.