



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION PRETORIA

Official Opening of Australian Consulate in Windhoek

Monday 19 March 2012

Remarks by Mr Bob McMullan,

Australian Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Africa

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, Ministers and officials of the Government of Namibia, fellow Ambassadors and High Commissioners, other members of the diplomatic corps, *Australia Awards* alumni, and members of the Australian community here in Windhoek.

A very warm welcome to you all.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in Windhoek for the official opening of the Australian Consulate headed by our Honorary Consul Ed Humphrey. It's particularly pleasing to be here in the week that Namibia is celebrating its National Day. Australia was a strong supporter of Namibia's independence. We hosted a Swapo office in Australia - headed at the time by the current Information Minister. We strongly supported UN action throughout the 1970s and 80s (including during our 1985-86 UNSC term), we contributed nearly 600 troops in two rotations to the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) and we sent around 30 electoral experts during the 1989 elections. I personally am very proud of our contribution and know that it laid the foundations for the strong bilateral relationship that Namibia and Australia have today.

This is my second visit to Namibia and the Australian Prime Minister has asked me to assess the progress in our bilateral relationship, as well as to consider ways to deepen cooperation between Australia and Namibia on multilateral issues, including within the United Nations. I will have no difficulty in reporting to her on the positive growth that I have observed on a number of different fronts. And Ed's appointment and the opening of the Honorary Consulate certainly reflects that growth.

Firstly our political-level engagement is expanding. Most recently, we were very pleased to welcome Namibia's President, Foreign Minister, Trade Minister and Minister

for Mining to Perth for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and associated business forum.

Our Foreign Ministers now meet more regularly in the margins of regional meetings, most recently at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa. Australia has invited both President Pohamba and Foreign Minister Nujoma to return to Australia as Guests of our Government for official state visits – and we hope these invitations will be able to be taken up sometime in 2012.

And of course, the Australian Governor-General visited Namibia in 2009 for what she tells me was one of the most exciting and memorable trips of her life.

Our trade relationship needs more work. The figure for merchandise trade is only AUD14million and we have already told Ed that one of his highest priorities is to work to expand that trade. He will also focus on investment partnership – although the story there is very positive. Thanks to Namibia's open economy and stable regulatory and political environment, the number of Australian companies interested in doing business in the country continues to grow, particularly in the mining sector. There are currently 26 Australian companies operating in the Namibian resources sector and we certainly expect further growth on this front.

And while commercial engagement will remain Australia's focus with Namibia we will continue our commitment to assist where we can to help with the country's development needs.

As in the past, Australian volunteers will remain a major component of our development relationship. We are also pleased that, in 2012, an increased number of Namibians will participate in postgraduate education and training opportunities through Australian Government-funded short and long term scholarships in key sectors such as mining, agriculture and resource management.

What makes this program work is the positive buy-in from the Namibian government and the effort that goes into ensuring Australian scholarships dovetail with the government's own human resource development strategy. I am really delighted that a number of alumni who have already studied in Australia are here with us tonight.

I am also delighted that through our Mining for Development Initiative there are a number of areas of current and potential cooperation in mining – reflecting the importance of the sector to both our economies as well as the challenges we both face to ensure we achieve the strongest development outcomes from sustainable exploitation of the sector. Last year, 7 Namibian officials participated in mining study tours to Australia and I want to see that number grow in future.

We are looking to build cooperation in agriculture and food security; as well as law enforcement capacity.

Australia is also interested in working with Namibia through regional and multilateral organisations, including the United Nations. Australia firmly believes that global challenges such as climate change, international development and disarmament require broad-based global solutions. Namibia is celebrating 31 years of independence and its voice in regional and international affairs is growing louder. Australia, too, as the world's 14th largest economy and member of the G20, is looking to play a global role commensurate with our international standing. It is imperative, therefore, that countries like ours work more closely together, including through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, to address our collective challenges. We would welcome Namibia's support for Australia's candidacy as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in 2013/14.

Of course, it is not just the Australian government that wants to do its bit to work with Namibia to realize its potential. There are a number of dedicated Australian individuals working in the non-government sector and in business who are making a contribution here – and I am very pleased to see a number of them tonight.

The Australian community here is not large but it is dynamic, diverse and growing – and of course if we include all our alumni – or the people I like to welcome as our 'Honorary Aussies' then the community is even bigger!

So the time is ripe for the opening of our Consulate in Windhoek. The consulate will play an essential role in providing consular and passport services to the expatriate community and also to the growing number of Australian tourists keen to explore this beautiful country. As I said earlier, there will be a big trade and investment focus for the office.

We believe Ed is the right person to provide those services. He brings commitment, dedication and experience to the job. He has made Namibia his home but of course maintains his love for Australia. I know he will do a great job. I ask all of you, whether in the diplomatic corps, government, business, civil society or in the Australian community, to give him your support and to work with him to help maintain the momentum in the Australia-Namibia bilateral relationship.

Once again, thank you all very much for joining us for this special occasion tonight.