

Burundi Food Security Forum, 12-14 December 2011

Speech by Paul Dziatkowicz, Deputy Australian Ambassador to Burundi
Bujumbura, 14 December 2011

Ministers, Excellencies [*list in order of priority...*],

I have been invited to say a few words today about Australia's relationship with Burundi, and to make a few observations about food security and Australia's approach to this issue.

Australia has a strong interest in democracy and peace consolidation in this country. In 2010 Australia committed \$4 million to the UN Peace-building Fund and \$2 million to support peace-building initiatives identified by the UN Peacebuilding Commission, focusing on Burundi and Sierra Leone. As part of that funding, Australia committed \$500,000 through UNDP to support the conduct of free and fair elections in Burundi. The funding supported the organisation of the elections, logistics and security, civic education, media coverage, and women's participation.

In addition, Australia contributed \$500,000 to a UNDP program that supports the consolidation of peace and stability through promoting economic opportunities for young Burundians. Under this activity, ex-combatants, returnees and displaced people are employed in construction of infrastructure, including bridges and roads. Australia also contributes to local community initiatives, through the Australia Africa Community Grants Scheme. Under the Scheme we have, for example, supported a Women's Peace and Recovery Project.

Importantly also, Burundi is one of the focus countries of the UNICEF Global Water and Sanitation Program, to which Australia provided \$3 million from 2009 until 2011 for activities in Africa, with a focus on improving sanitation in schools.

Separately, in line with Burundi's strategy of looking increasingly beyond its borders to form partnerships in the region and the rest of the world, Australia continues to provide training opportunities to Burundian officials in areas that will help Burundi become a stronger player in the international system - including in diplomacy, trade, and the English language. In 2011 Burundi received seven scholarships in these areas. We are also offering assistance in the form of English language training to Burundian officials, to assist Burundi in its efforts to integrate into the East African Community, an increasingly important regional institution.

The key issue being discussed this week in Bujumbura is food security. Australia supports Africa's vision of agriculture-led development, and is keen to work with African countries to share our expertise in agriculture. We have much in common with Africa: we share dry and unpredictable climates, often poor-quality soils, and vast distances. We therefore have much to learn from each other.

More than two-thirds of Africans depend on agriculture for their income and basic food needs. Research demonstrates that countries with higher agricultural growth have lower poverty rates. Therefore, by improving agriculture and food markets, there is an opportunity to lift millions of African people out of poverty. Australia supports African efforts to improve food security by

boosting long-term agricultural productivity and building resilience, while meeting the immediate needs of vulnerable people when humanitarian crises occur.

To this end, the Australian Prime Minister recently announced a new initiative to share Australia's expertise in food production with the people of Africa – namely the establishment of a new Australian International Centre for Food Security to provide agricultural research and advice to African countries. Africa has 60 per cent of the world's uncultivated farmable land, however one in three Africans still go hungry every day. We believe Australia has an important role to play in supporting African countries to confront the challenge of food security. Australia will provide more than \$36 million to establish the Centre, which will be based in Canberra, with an office to be established in Africa.

In Burundi, Australia has provided capacity-building assistance in agriculture in the form of study opportunities. These focus on four areas in which Australia has expertise and experience, namely dry-land farming, post harvest management, water harvesting/small scale irrigation and livestock. Burundi is also a member country of the BecA Hub (BioSciences east and central Africa), which Australia is supporting through \$12 million in funding over multiple years.

As illustrated by these examples, Australia takes an active interest in the future of this country. As Burundians look to the future with increasing hope and optimism, Australia will do what it can to help Burundi in its pursuit of sustainable peace and development.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning.