

**SPEECH BY AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER
HE GEOFF TOOTH TO COMMEMORATE AUSTRALIA DAY
MUTHAIGA, 28 JANUARY 2014**

Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament, Honoured Guests, Fellow Australians,

Joanne and I, and all the staff of the Australian High Commission in Nairobi are delighted that you can join us tonight to celebrate Australia's national day - of two days ago - and our bilateral relationship with Kenya.

I'm particularly thrilled that Australia's Honorary Consul to Uganda, Mr Patrick Bitature, is here with us. Patrick has become an indispensable part of the Australian family in East Africa, including late last year when he helped with the evacuation of many Australians from South Sudan. We were indeed the lucky country the day he agreed to represent us.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to start my short speech tonight by talking about three groups strongly represented here today.

In the audience tonight we have a large number of Australian volunteers, young people from every Australian state and territory, who have taken leave from their careers in Australia to work in Kenya. Currently we have 38 highly skilled volunteers that are contributing their knowledge, energy and enthusiasm to organisations committed to advancing development outcomes in Kenya and the region. There are volunteers working to improve legal rights for women, others working with agricultural research organisations, like ICRAF and ILRI, on livestock and agricultural productivity projects, still others are working with the Kenyan Red Cross, the Obuya Cricket Academy, UN agencies and small education NGOs like So They Can.

They have joined a sizeable community of Australian NGOs and charity workers. We have some extraordinary Australians in this part of the world, doing extraordinary things. Gemma Sisi and her St Judes Schools, Mike Flynn and his Little Sports program that brings sport to some of the most disadvantaged children in Africa, Jim and Pamela working with the

Kibera Film School and the Hot Sun Foundation; Brother Frank O'Shea and other Christian Brothers from the Ruben Centre; the Women to Women in Africa project; Sionach Waugh working with the Canan Children's Home in Bamburi; Catherine Whiting with Impoverished Children. The list is much longer than my time today will allow but we are proud of them all and all are worth celebrating.

The last group I would like to highlight are the Australian alumni, and I know we have a number here tonight. 2013 saw the beginning of the Kenya-Australia Alumni Association here, chaired by Mahul Shah, an Australian with deep Kenyan roots. We want the Association to become an indispensable part of the Kenyan scene, serving as a focal point and networking opportunity for all Kenyans that have studied in Australia. And there are many of them. Kenya is our number one source of students from sub-Saharan Africa. We received around 1,000 applications last year. These students will graduate with globally recognised qualifications and return to Kenya, to contribute to the ongoing success of this country.

I am delighted to announce today that we have a further 23 potential Alumni members with 23 Kenyans heading to Australia this month under the Australian Awards scholarship program. This follows 87 winners in 2013 and 304 in total since the program began in 2004, making Kenya one of the most successful African countries at securing awards.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, The Kenya-Australia relationship is a warm and growing one across the board.

No better illustrated is this than in the mining sector. We have 400 Australian mining companies active in Africa, and 40 in East Africa. But Kenya has been less successful than many others in attracting mining investment. That changes in coming weeks when Australia's Base resources starts shipping rutile and ilmenite to world markets. Base is expected to add between 0.8 and 1 percent to Kenya's GDP, employ nearly 450 Kenyans, and generate \$220 million a year in direct government revenue. But perhaps its most important legacy will be the head-turning affect it should have for the international investment community. It will starkly show that Kenya is open for mining business.

Other Australian companies are also here, including the SMEC, East African Copper, Swala and Far. All recognise the extraordinary resource potential of this country, as well as Nairobi role as a commercial hub for East Africa's growing markets. Meanwhile in Australia we now have a thriving Kenya Australia Chamber of Commerce building two way business links.

2014 looks set to be a promising year for the bilateral relationship. We will formally open our Food Security Centre in Nairobi as a focal point for agricultural research across Africa.

On the arts front, Tropfest, the highly successful Australian short-film festival, will present in Nairobi in March. I am delighted that tonight you can see some of the extraordinary art of Alexandra Spyrtos, a Kenyan artist who spends half of each year in Australia.

Meanwhile Australia will continue to support Kenya with its devolution process, based on our long experience of Federalism.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Australia well recognizes the extraordinary burden that Kenya has in supporting refugees from strife torn neighbouring countries. For its part, Australia is one of the most welcoming refugee resettlement countries in the world, having taken 620,000 since joining the Refugee Convention 60 years ago. Many thousands of these have come from Kenya and are contributing to our rich multicultural society.

Australia also recognises the important contribution Kenya is making in promoting stability in Somalia and South Sudan. Australia continues to support AMISOM and has been providing technical assistance to the East African Standby Brigade based in Kenya.

In 2013 Australia worked with Kenyan authorities and communities to promote peaceful elections in Kenya – and let me take the opportunity to again congratulate the people of Kenya for their commitment they showed to democracy and peace. I am delighted that one of the fruits of that work – the important, award winning Kenyan film Nisisi - is in the bag you will receive after this event tonight.

On the sporting front, we continue to look at opportunities to work closely with Kenya. Kenya and Australia have a long history of intense competition on the sporting field, starting with Kip Kino's first international run at the 1962 Commonwealth Games in Perth. 2018 will see Australia host the Commonwealth Games and we are already worried about how many medals we will have to give to Kenyan runners. On that note, I am delighted that one of my heroes and one of Kenya's greatest runners, Tegla Loroupe can be with us tonight; Tegla has become much more than a sporting hero of course with her extraordinary work to promote peace.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, Let me finish on a sombre but I hope inspiring note. In September last year Australia lost a brilliant young architect, Ross Langdon, and his wife in the Westgate tragedy. Ross was utterly committed to East Africa and to improving the lives of people here. His loss is of course a terrible tragedy but it is more so if we let terrorists and their like stop us working to better this world.

We have many Australians like Ross here working to build a better Kenya. We have many Kenyans in Australia expanding and deepening relations between our two countries. It is these people we should salute and support on days like Australia Day.

I, and all my staff, wish you all a productive and healthy 2014. I look forward to working closely with you over my last year in Kenya.

Now can I finish by asking all here to join me in toasting the people and President of Kenya, His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta.

And can I now ask a good friend of Australia, Ambassador Lanyasunya to the stage.