



Australian Government

Government Response

to the Report of the

**Joint Standing Committee on
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**

**Inquiry into Australia's relationship
with the countries of Africa**

Government Response to the Report of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Inquiry into Australia's relationship with the countries of Africa: Recommendations

Government to Government Links

Recommendation 1

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should undertake a comprehensive review of Australia's diplomatic representation in Africa with a view to opening an additional post in Francophone Africa.

The Government agrees with the recommendation of the Committee.

The Government sees value in the establishment of an additional diplomatic post in Francophone Africa. The composition of the network of diplomatic posts overseas is under constant review and the Government will pursue the establishment of a new post in the region as soon as possible.

Recommendation 2

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should, pending the implementation of Recommendation 1, increase the number of Australia-based French speaking diplomatic staff in its West African High Commissions. They should have specific responsibility for covering Australia's interests in Francophone West African countries.

The Government agrees with the recommendation of the Committee.

The Government recognises the importance of French-language skills for diplomatic staff at posts in Francophone Africa and has increased the number of French language-designated speaking positions in West Africa. There are now four French language-designated positions in Australia's missions to Abuja and Accra – 50 per cent of Australia's positions to these posts, including the Head of Mission in Abuja. Australia's mission to Paris is now accredited to five African countries which adds further to the number of diplomatic staff with French language skills working in Africa.

Recommendation 3

As a short to medium term measure, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should increase the number of honorary consuls appointed to represent Australia in African countries.

The Government agrees with the recommendation of the Committee.

The Government has appointed four new honorary consuls since the Committee's Inquiry, several others are in the process of appointment and the Government will continue to appoint more where appropriate. There are now five Honorary Consulates operating in Africa: Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Nigeria (Lagos), and Uganda. One other (Cape Town in South Africa) is temporarily closed and five more (Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia) are at various stages in the process of being established.

Recommendation 4

The Government should increase the number of Australian parliamentary delegations to specific African countries particularly to those with increasing significance to Australia.

The Government supports the recommendation of the Committee.

Australia's Aid Program

Recommendation 5

AusAID should provide funding assistance to capacity building programs such as that conducted by the Australian Leadership Program for Africa and similar organisations.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to support capacity building and leadership development.

AusAID is providing Africans with a range of capacity building and leadership development opportunities in Australia and in Africa. African candidates are eligible to apply for Australian Leadership Awards (scholarships). In 2011, for the first time, 18 African candidates were selected to receive Australian Leadership Awards that will commence in 2012. These are Masters-level courses with an additional leadership component. Australian organisations, including the Australian Leadership Program for Africa, can apply for funding under the Australia Leadership Award Fellowships (ALAF) Program to host fellows from African countries for up to three months for research, training, work attachments and mentoring. In 2011, 98 African candidates were supported through the Program. These and other Australia Awards Alumni are also provided with leadership and capacity-building support upon return to their home country. The Government has committed to offering up to 1,000 Australia Awards per year by 2013.

Recommendation 6

AusAID should increase funding for the Australian Business Volunteers program so that it can expand coverage to African countries.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) is part of a consortium - with Austraining International - that is a core partner of the Australian Government's recently launched Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) initiative. Through the AVID initiative, AusAID is expanding support for volunteers in Africa including through the ABV-Austraining consortium. Feasibility and planning assessments are currently underway for possible ABV placements in Africa.

Recommendation 7

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism should establish and fund a special unit tasked with establishing a regulatory framework model for the mining and resources sector which African countries could consider adopting according to their requirements.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to provide assistance to African countries in mining governance.

On 25 October 2011, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Prime Minister announced the Government's new Mining for Development Initiative. The Initiative will benefit a range of developing countries, including African countries.

The flagship activity under the initiative, the International Mining for Development Centre, will, amongst other things, assist in capacity building for personnel in developing countries in the development of regulatory frameworks for application in the mining sector in Africa (and elsewhere).

An additional component of the Initiative is the establishment of a Government Linkages program. This program will enable federal, state and local government agencies to work with counterparts in developing countries, including Africa, to share expertise including on Australian regulatory frameworks and regulations. This will assist African countries establish and refine their own legal mining frameworks.

In addition to this new initiative, the Government, through the Australian aid program, is already providing assistance to support development of regulatory frameworks in Africa's mining sector, including with the assistance of the Queensland and Western Australian State Governments. In 2011, Australia hosted three study tours on mining regulation and governance for 80 African mining officials from 17 countries. Australia also provided 70 short course awards covering a range of mining regulatory issues and is providing technical assistance to a number of countries to assist them reform and strengthen their mining regulatory frameworks.

Recommendation 8

DFAT should coordinate regular meetings between AusAID, NGOs, and Australian resource companies engaged in Africa, with a view to facilitating aid and development delivery cooperation to take advantage of their differing and complementary strengths.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

The Government, through DFAT and other relevant agencies including AusAID and DRET is presently engaged in dialogue with resource companies and NGOs on their common interests in engagement in Africa. This includes dialogue on future opportunities to work together, where this makes sense.

In its response to the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness, the Government emphasised that the fundamental purpose of the aid program is to help people overcome poverty. The Government also outlined that the aid program will be delivered through fewer – but larger – programs in fewer sectors. A range of relatively small partnerships with a number of mining companies focussed on areas proximate to their mine sites does not meet the principles outlined in the Government's response to the aid review. The Government nonetheless agrees that there are some opportunities for leveraging development impact through partnerships with the mining industry.

As part of the 'Mining for Development Initiative', the Government announced \$22 million for a Community and Social Development program which will support partnerships to improve social, environmental and economic outcomes related to mining in developing countries, including in Africa.

The Government will continue to use events such as Africa Down Under in Perth and the Mining Indaba in South Africa to bring together the government, private, academic and NGO sectors to network and share experiences on development and sustainable mining principles and best practices.

Education Links

Recommendation 9

AusAID's scholarships program should include providing scholarships to African students to undertake tertiary education in Africa. This could involve study at African universities and at Australian universities with links with Africa such as Monash South Africa.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

The Government's Australia Awards (scholarships) Program already provides opportunities for post-graduate in-Africa study, and therefore recognises the sound principle of supporting nationals of a country to study locally and contextualise their studies.

The Program provides a range of post-graduate Short Course Awards (for periods of study, research and work attachment of up to three months) in various technical areas. These courses may be delivered either in Australia or Africa (or a mix of both) through partnerships between Australian registered training organisations and African institutions. The research component of Masters and PhD Awards (up to 12 months) may also be undertaken in Africa.

One of the aims of the Australia Awards Program is to build links with Australia through providing in-Australia learning opportunities at the post-graduate level. This also assures the quality of the education provided. Post-graduate study is an area of weakness for many African universities. Australia's tertiary education institutions are highly regarded by African countries as are Australian qualifications.

Recipients of Australia Awards are required to return to their home country on completion of their study program to apply their learning to the benefit of their home country. AusAID maintains contact with Australia Awards alumni and provides them with access to professional development opportunities in-Africa.

Recommendation 10

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations should:

- *establish a Centre for African Studies;*
- *invite competitive tenders from Australian universities for the establishment of the Centre;*
- *engage stake-holders and potential partners for the Centre;*
- *provide sufficient funding so that the Centre can:*
 - *undertake research, education and training functions;*
 - *engage with industry;*
 - *raise the profile of African Studies in Australia; and*
 - *provide value to both government and non-government end-users.*

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation and the recent efforts of Australian universities to improve coordination of educational engagement with Africa through the establishment of an Australia Africa Universities Network.

DEEWR is unable to fund the establishment of a Centre of Africa Studies at this time. Mechanisms and priorities for supporting increased educational engagement with Africa and with other regions and countries will be considered in the development of the five year national strategy to support the sustainability and quality of the international education sector.

Trade and Investment

Recommendation 11

The Government should increase the number of Austrade offices and personnel that are based in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

In May 2011 Trade Minister Craig Emerson announced a comprehensive reform of the Australian Trade Commission, Austrade, aimed at better meeting the needs of Australian businesses.

The government recognises that emerging markets across Africa offer growing prospects for Australian businesses. As part of the reform, Austrade will strengthen its presence in Sub Saharan Africa as resources become available.

Recommendation 12

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship should expand the issuing of e-visas across Africa, with priority to establishing the service in countries where there is the potential to expand trade, academic, research and other links.

The Government agrees in principle with the Committee's recommendation.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) supports the objective of expanding links with African countries through facilitating access to visas. All African countries have access to eVisa facilities for lodgement of applications for Long Stay (Temporary) Business visas and General Skilled Migration visas. In addition, Botswana, Mauritius, Seychelles and South Africa have eVisa access to applications for select student visas.

Fast tracking and label free facilitation arrangements are now in place for low risk applicants such as Government ministers, senior Government officials and senior business people. These applications are processed within 48 hours and without the requirement to supply a passport. These fast arrangements were developed in consultation with Austrade and have been widely used by Australian mining companies operating in Africa.

Future eVisa access for other types of visas is being considered but will be subject to technical considerations and risk assessment. Assessment of risk is based on a country's visa grant/refusal rates, incidence of visa holders not returning to their countries, overstayer numbers and illegal worker notices issued.

It should be noted that because of high rates of document and identity fraud in various African countries, all applications, whether they are lodged electronically or physically, require the provision of supporting documentation which adds to the time required to process a visa application.

To reduce delays, DIAC has appointed agents in a number of African countries, to accept applications and/or to verify identity. For example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been appointed to provide document verification services in 23 African countries where DIAC does not have offices. A service delivery partner (VFS Global) has been engaged to operate Australian Visa Application Centres (AVACs) in Kenya (Nairobi), Nigeria (Abuja and Lagos), South Africa (Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria) and Zimbabwe (Harare).

These new arrangements have significantly improved visa processing times and the integrity of the process. Further expansion of these arrangements in Africa is under consideration.

The department is committed to continuing to improve service for all clients and is actively looking at expanding access to online visa services generally.

Recommendation 13

The Government should undertake steps for Australia to become an EITI compliant country.

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation.

On 27 October 2011, the Australian Government announced that, in consultation with state and territory governments, industry and non-government organisations, it will undertake a domestic pilot of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). An Australian EITI pilot will apply the EITI principles to information gathered from governments and a sample of Australian and multi-national companies operating in Australia's extractives sector. The sample will include companies of various sizes extracting a range of commodities from different jurisdictions.

The pilot will enable the Government, civil society and industry to promote international acceptance of the EITI, test the applicability and usefulness of EITI principles in the Australian context, and determine costs and benefits of the EITI approach for the Australian community. The Government will use the results and evaluation of the pilot to determine whether Australia should implement EITI and become an EITI compliant country.

A steering committee of Commonwealth and state and territory governments, industry and non-government organisations' representatives will oversee the pilot's conduct. The pilot's data collection period of 12 months is scheduled to commence 1 July 2012, after which data analysis, reporting and evaluation phases will follow. The Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism will provide up to \$500,000 to fund the EITI pilot.

Recommendation 14

The Government should promote corporate social responsibility and continue to promote the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative principles and other corporate social responsibility instruments to the Australian mining sector, in particular at the Australia Down Under Conference, and especially to new entrants and small operators.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

The Government has used events such as Africa Down Under and the Mining Indaba Conference in South Africa to bring together the government, private, academic and NGO sectors to promote and share experience and leading practice on corporate social responsibility (CSR), and other sustainable mining practices and principles and will continue to do so, including by promoting awareness of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) principles.

On 31 August 2011, AusAID organised a social responsibility session as part of the Murdoch University Africa-Australia Research Forum at Africa Down Under which was attended by the private sector, NGOs, academia and government (Australian and African) officials.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Resources and Energy jointly launched a new handbook on Social Responsibility for the Mining and Minerals Sector in Developing Countries during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth in October 2011. The handbook was developed by the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism in partnership with AusAID and in consultation with the Australian mining industry, the Minerals Council of Australia and academia. It is a guide to leading practice in social responsibility for resources companies operating in developing countries, to ensure communities receive long-term benefits from mining. It outlines key considerations for socially responsible mining development for companies operating, or planning to operate, in developing countries and draws on leading practice examples both in Australia and overseas. .

Recommendation 15

The Government should facilitate contacts between mining sector companies, NGOs, and the broader private sector who are able to assist them in creating and executing corporate social responsibility policies.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

As noted in the response to recommendation 14, the Government will continue to use events such as Africa Down Under and the Mining Indaba in South Africa to bring together the government, private, academic and NGO sectors to promote and share experience and leading practice on corporate social responsibility practices.

Furthermore, the Government announced A\$22 million for a Community and Social Development program as part of the Mining for Development Initiative to support partnerships to improve social, environmental and economic outcomes related to mining in developing countries, including in Africa.

More broadly, the Australian Government has taken action to encourage corporate social responsibility in a number of ways, including through promoting the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas and support for the UN Global Compact. These are guidelines for companies committed to sustainability and responsible business practices.

Recommendation 16

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should establish, and provide adequate funding for an Australia-Africa Council.

The Government agrees in principle with the Committee's recommendation.

While the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has insufficient funding to establish at this time an Australia-Africa Council along lines similar to those currently existing for other countries and regions, the Government will give consideration to establishing a Council in the future.

Recommendation 17

The proposed Australia-Africa Council should include within its goals, support for activities that encourage and facilitate cultural interchange and exchange, particularly including the Australian African community.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

The establishment of other Foundations, Councils and Institutes by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been one effective way to develop further cultural interchange and exchange between Australia and other countries. The Government will take this recommendation into account in further consideration on establishment of an Australia-Africa Council.

