**Speech by HE Geoff Tooth, Australian High Commissioner to Kenya,**

**at the launch of the “Forgiveness Project: The F word exhibition”,**

**Tribe Hotel, 4 February 2013**

Ladies and Gentlemen

This is an extraordinary and important project and one the Australian High Commission is very proud to be associated with.

I won’t talk for long. It is the stories and photos you will see here that should be doing the talking tonight and over coming weeks. And in any case it is a bit daunting to follow one of your heroes even if he is only appearing on video. Archbishop Tutu helped transform this continent and inspire the world with his response to hate, discrimination and violence. It is a glowing testament to the power of the forgiveness project that it comes endorsed by someone of his statue.

I also feel a little bit of a fraud speaking in the company of victims of tragedy and violence. I after all come from a life of comfort with my human rights and security well protected. I cannot pretend to understand just how difficult the act of forgiveness must be - what it must take to look again into the eyes of someone who has caused you hurt and loss and to say the f word.

But I have seen and heard how dangerous not forgiving is. In former Yugoslavia I listened to people espouse hate for their neighbours based on a thousand year old history of conflict, and saw the devastation of Sarajevo, Srebrenica and Mostar that resulted.  In Papua New Guinea I walked through scenes of slaughter and destruction arising out of a tribal conflict that had been left unresolved for five generations.  In the last year I have been in Rwanda and Burundi, northern Uganda, South Sudan and Sudan and many parts of Kenya where violence has destroyed lives and communities and remains a real threat to many.

There is one thing I do know.  Forgiving isn’t forgetting, nor does it replace justice.  It can’t be; it would be dangerous if it was.  Forgetting can lead to further cycles of conflict and hate, to lessons not being learnt, to the sweeping away of history and memory.

But forgiving coupled with remembering allows for the return of hope. It allows people to move forward and to re-establish community, it can allow people to embrace that other f word, the future.

We have heard from one of my heroes Archbishop Tutu.  Another, Nelson Mandela, told us that as he walked to freedom, out of the door of the jail that had held him for much of his life, that he knew that if he did not leave his bitterness and hatred behind, he would still be in a prison.

Another hero, President Obama, told Kenyans this week to reject a path of violence and division so Kenya can move forward towards prosperity and opportunity and unleash the extraordinary talents of its people. This election he said was a moment for the people of Kenya to come together, instead of tearing apart.

These are words we should all endorse. But even more so are the stories that have been shared with us today through this project. Of Joseph who lost his pregnant wife and five year old son five years ago, of Douglas blinded by terrorists, of Frederick and Phillip, and of Paddy who not only forgave his torturer but helped him and his family. These are extraordinary people. They should become the heroes of Kenyans too and their inspiration for not just the coming election but for the years ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen, Let me finish with a big thank you to Neil, Simon, Marina and Joan, and all others that have been involved in putting this amazing project together. Neil has been the face of the forgiveness project for the High Commission and his passion, commitment and persistence has been something to behold and admire.

And let me thank you all for coming tonight.  Tell everyone you know of this exhibition and its central message. This is one f word that is worth using a lot and certainly worth sharing.