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**SPEECH BY H.E. GEOFF TOOTH, AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER, AT THE OPENING OF THE PAMOJA INCLUSION HUB RESOURCE ROOM, MBAGATHI ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL,**

**KIBERA, NAIROBI, 28 FEBRUARY 2013**

* Mrs Muia, Head Teacher, Mbagathi Road Primary School,
* Mrs Bulinda, Head Teacher, Joseph Kang’ethe Primary,
* Edith van Wijngaarden, Handicap International
* Representative from the Ministry of Education, representatives of Nairobi Family Support Services, the local area chief, teachers, parents, members of the local community and the most important guests of all of course the children,
* This is a wonderful place. A place that represents hope and potential. A place that allows the disabled to take a stronger role in their society, that will allow children to develop and grow in a secure environment, a place that provides support and services where they are lacking, a place that will break down prejudices and stigmas and encourages community spirit.
* Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, As I expect you can tell I am quite delighted to be here today, honoured that you have asked me to speak and very proud that the Australian Government has supported this project.
* Kenya has 1.7 million people living with a disability. Kibera has maybe 20,000 disabled children. These are big figures. But they are easier to digest and respond to if we think of them not as a burden but in terms of realising potential.
* One of the most often used statements about disability services is that the strength of a society and a community can be judged by how they look after their most vulnerable. There is some truth to this, but I believe that we need to see disability services in terms of realising potential.
* A strong vibrant forward looking society develops, promotes and uses the skills and talents of every citizen, whatever their gender, race or physical make-up. Not to do so is a waste of scarce resources and valuable talent, talent that can be used to build a society, increase productivity and help realise millennium development goals. In other words, and I know this is used often, we need to take the ‘dis’ away from disability and think more of the abilities these children and all disabled people have, abilities that are the equal of and just as valuable to a society as those of the so called able bodied.
* This inclusion hub and the other that follow it in Dandora and elsewhere, can do that, but it will only do so with ongoing with community, government and donor support.
* Let me offer some thank yous. I especially want to recognise Handicap International for their financial and technical support that allowed this project to become reality. Handicap International is a valued partner for the Australian Government worldwide. It is an organisation that we are confident will use Australian taxpayer funds effectively and well. It is also an organisation we trust with our extraordinary Youth Ambassadors. I would like to make special mention of Youth Ambassador Larissa Taylor who pushed me very hard to be here today and I know has an immense passion for her work with Handicap International.
* Larissa tells me that there are a number of heroes who have driven this project. Hannah Mwangi and Jessy Wainaina of Nairobi Family Support Services have worked tirelessly to get this room ready and have shown passion and commitment to it from the outset. You deserve to feel very proud today. The school teachers led by Mrs Regina Muia have I hear been champions for inclusive education and the resource room. This and similar hubs won’t work unless the teachers get behind them and I applaud your commitment. And to the City Education and Minister of Education officials who have been involved – thank you for your ongoing support for inclusive education. I urge you to go back and educate your colleagues, and your new Minister when she or he is appointed, of the importance of what is happening here and the need to keep supporting it.
* To the Kibera Community I urge you to be involved with this Resource Room, with this school and with inclusive education. This can’t and won’t work without your involvement, without your understanding and your support.
* And finally to the children here today future – your job, and the best way you can say thank you to all those that have worked so hard to make this place happen, is to be the very best you can be; to use the opportunities this place offers to become great citizens of this wonderful country.
* Thank you again for inviting me today and being so very welcoming. You have an ongoing friend in Australia and one that is committed to what you are doing here. Asante Sana and all the best for the election.