**ADDRESS BY THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER TO RWANDA**

**GEOFF TOOTH**

**AT THE OPENING OF THE
 UN SENIOR MISSION LEADERS COURSE**

**MONDAY 21 MAY**

**LEMIGO HOTEL, KIGALI, RWANDA**

The Right Honorable Prime Minister, Dr Pierre Damien Habumuremyi

Defence Minister, General James Kabarebe

UN Resident Representative

Director of the Rwandan Peace Academy

My fellow High Commissioners, Ambassadors and other representatives of the diplomatic corps

Trainers, future Senior Mission Leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honored to be here today and to share the stage with such distinguished company. Let me begin by expressing my thanks to the Prime Minister and the Rwandan Government for hosting this importing event.

It is a significant moment for our bilateral relationship that Australia is partnering Rwanda on this course and the Military Observers Course being held at the Rwanda Peace Academy in Nyakinama. Our two countries have many joint interests in building capacity to advance peace and security in Africa and globally. We share a number of core values on peace keeping including being amongst the international community’s leading proponents of the right to protect principal. Rwanda and Australia are major contributors to peace keeping both in pure numbers of peacekeepers and in the range of operations we support. I have heard this morning that Rwanda is amongst the world’s highest per capita contributors to peace keeping operations. This is something the people of Rwanda should be extraordinarily proud of.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa matters to Australia and it is an old destination for us. Australians have been visiting and trading here for decades and when required we have assisted militarily. Our involvement from a defence perspective started in South Africa during the Boer War and we have also seen tours in the First and Second World Wars. Australians have served in the African nations of the Congo, Rhodesia, Uganda, Namibia, Western Sahara, Somalia, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Darfur in the western Sudan. Here in Rwanda we provided medical support through a 293 Australian contingent in 1994-95. Significantly the Australian presence here for the two courses that are starting today – 10 instructors and 6 students - is the biggest Australian defence contingent in Rwanda since those days.

Currently we contribute to the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan and for the first time in our history, we also have a Defence Attaché for Africa, Colonel James Davey present here today. James brings great experience to his role having served in Darfur with the African Union-United Nations operation. Our plan is to continue to support capacity building in the peace and security sectors where we can throughout the continent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The message I would like to convey to you is that that Australia is in Africa for the long-haul - we have significant people-to-people links and investment in the continent. We share interests in a secure global environment as today's security threats transcend borders and continents. The UN has a pivotal role to play, and this is why we heavily invest in supporting UN peacekeeping and on this occasion helping to build capacity in those skills needed for operating in UN peace operations. Australian believes that it is vital that countries share their experiences in security and stability operations, particularly as peacekeeping is becoming increasingly complex operation. It is extremely important that civilian, police, military and community actors work together to build sustainable peace and this is rightly a key part of the course.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Australia is also looking to learn from the experiences of African and other partners, and we stand ready to share our own. The course will provide a venue for many diverse participants to bring their experiences to the table and learn from each other. Whilst this training is UN sponsored and badged, it is also transferable to other African Union peace missions you could become involved in. Australia is honored to be able to provide the resources to support this important training and I would encourage you all to take advantage of this opportunity.

My thanks again for inviting me to attend this opening. I wish all involved with the course a productive and enjoyable experience in this beautiful country.