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

**Speech at the premier of Ni Sisi, Official Residence,**

**Thursday 21 February 2013**

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you so much for joining Joanne and I here under the stars tonight. We were, it is fair to say, a little bit nervous about doing an outdoor event. But if tonight works we may make it a regular feature of life here in Muthaiga.

Tonight I am not going to speak for long and ruin your viewing experience. For tonight is all about some very dedicated people doing powerful things to help Kenya hold peaceful elections and to reduce violence in Kenyan society. There are many to acknowledge: Nick Redding and his colleagues at SAFE, Neil Thomas and all those involved with the Forgiveness Project, Bob Collymore and the fantastic SAFARICOM Foundation – who have played such an important role in strengthening Kenyan indentity - Ambassador Tegla Lurepe and her peace foundation, Greg Mwendwa and his team at Hivos and many others represented here tonight and so many that unfortunately are not. These are extraordinary people doing extraordinary things in the name of peace.

I would also like to welcome the members of the media who have come tonight. You have such an important role to play in this vital election.

I hope many of you have had a chance to read the statement that many of the Diplomatic Missions in Nairobi, including Australia’s, released yesterday. It is a strong message of support for all the peoples of Kenya as they enter the election period. We made clear that we take no sides, favour no candidate; the choice of Kenya’s leaders is up to the Kenyan people alone. But we are acutely aware of the damage that violence caused at the last election - to Kenyan’s, to Kenya’s economy and reputation and to the wider East African region. That is why we have joined hands with the IEBC, with civil society and the many Kenyans across this country working for a successful, credible election.

That is why we echo calls to all those seeking political office to pledge publicly their commitment to a peaceful election and transition and to act in accordance with the code of conduct set out in the 2011 Elections Act. That is why we urged all Kenyans to respect their new Constitution, to accept the results of the election and to resolve disputes using the legal mechanisms set out in the Constitution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While you were having a drink tonight I hope you had a chance to look at the Forgiveness project and its amazing stories. As I said last week at the opening of the project forgiveness isn’t about forgetting. Kenya and the international community cannot forget the victims of 2007-08; legal processes and reconciliation attempts must continue. Otherwise we risk not learning the lessons of the past and endangering democracy, Kenyan prosperity and peace.

I would now like to ask Nick Redding, one of the genius’s behind this film to come and say a few words. I first met Nick a couple of years ago at the launch of SAFE’s previous award winning film. He is a man with an impressive record as an actor, producer, director and writer. But much more than that he is someone who cares passionately about Kenya. So taken was I by his passion and commitment that I agreed to hold this event tonight without seeing the script or film. So I am hoping that the bad guy doesn’t turn out to be the Crocodile Hunter of another Australian.

I do hope you enjoy this film. But more than that I hope that you hear its message of peace and forgiveness, while never forgetting the victims of violence and discrimination. Please stay on after for a drink, to meet the actors and director, to read again the extraordinary stories described in the Forgiveness Project.

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