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MEDIA RELEASE

Australia to provide 1000 scholarships for Africans

The Australian Government will, within four years, increase by up to ten-fold scholarships and fellowships offered to students from across Africa. This will see up to 1,000 scholarships and fellowships available to Africans.

The announcement was made by Australian Foreign Minister, the Hon Stephen Smith MP, in an address to the African Union Executive Council in Addis Ababa on 29 January.

Foreign Minister Smith was the first Australian Foreign Minister to visit the African Union since its establishment in 2002. The purpose of the visit was to convey the Australian Government's commitment to enhance Australia's relationships with the nation states, regional institutions and the continent of Africa.

Australia's strengthened engagement with Africa is designed to support Africa's efforts to promote economic growth and prosperity through investment and trade, to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, and to address peace and security challenges.

As part of this enhanced engagement, Australia will implement a new development assistance strategy. The new strategy will include an increase in Australian development assistance to the continent, which has already been increased by 23 per cent since November 2007. Despite the international economic downturn, Australia's commitment to increasing its development cooperation efforts on the continent remains strong.

In acknowledgment that human resource development is a key to Africa's future, and given Australia's expertise and experience, the scholarships will focus on areas such as agriculture, mining, maternal and child healthcare, and water and sanitation where Australia has a comparative advantage and substantial expertise and relevant experience.

Scholarships are already an important part of Australia's development assistance program to Africa. Over 800 African students have been supported by the Australian Government in the past ten years. In addition to the scholarship program, there are nearly 9,000 African students currently studying in Australia.

For further information, the Foreign Minister's address can be found at http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2009/090129_african_union.html

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