



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION

PRETORIA

Australia and South Africa sign a film co-production agreement

Department of Arts and Culture, Pretoria
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Remarks by Ms Kate Ellis, Australian Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth and Minister for Sport

I am very pleased that Australia and South Africa will today sign a film co-production agreement.

Australia has such treaties with only eight (8) other countries (UK, Canada, Italy, Ireland, Israel, Germany, China and Singapore), and Memoranda of Understanding with two (2) others (France and New Zealand).

Australia has a very clear set of criteria for entering into treaty-level agreements on film co-production. These include:

- Our national interest – i.e. does it bring social, economic and cultural benefits to Australia?
- Our broader foreign policy objectives;
- Industry interest;
- The quality of the partner country's film industry; and
- The potential for cultural and creative exchange, amongst others.

For Australia, the conclusion of an agreement with South Africa clearly fulfils all of these criteria.

The Australian government is firmly of the view that ***strengthening engagement with Africa, including through greater cooperation in the creative sphere, is in our national interest and meets our foreign policy objectives.***

We want to work in partnership with the peoples, countries and regional institutions of Africa to be a part of the brighter future that Africa is forging.

We are **enhancing our diplomatic and political engagement**, with the Australian Foreign Minister recently announcing that Australia will open an Embassy in Addis Ababa. And we have had more high-level political visits between Australia and Africa in the last year than in the last ten years.

We have **expanded our development assistance program to Africa** – in 2009/2010 by 40 per cent and in 2010/2011 by a further 23 per cent. Australia wants to draw on our experience and expertise in ways that will make a unique and positive contribution to Africa, principally in the areas of agriculture and food security, maternal and child health, water and sanitation, and human resource capacity building through the Australia Awards program.

By 2012-2013, through our Australia Awards program, we will provide 1000 post-graduate scholarships and awards each year by 2012-2013.

Other areas of focus of our enhanced engagement strategy include more support for the expansion on Australian trade and investment on the continent and a contribution on peace and security matters in Africa.

The third criteria for entering into treaty-level agreements that I noted was industry interest. I understand that **film industries in both our countries have expressed significant interest** in accessing the benefits of the agreement and to build on the co-operation that is already taking place between Australian and South African film-makers to great effect.

For example, the recent film *Disgrace*, adapted from the book by South Africa's prize-winning author JM Coetzee and a new film *The Team that Never Played* are two high quality joint South African–Australian productions.

I am very excited that *The Team that Never Played* will premiere in South Africa at the official opening of the Africa on Screen and Soccer Film festivals on Thursday 24 June. *The Team that Never Played* is a film about apartheid era football players that never participated in the FIFA World Cup owing to sporting sanctions. I expect it to receive a very positive reception not only in South Africa but also internationally.

South Africa's film industry quality is clear to see with the recent international success of films such as *District 9* and *Tsotsi* so this criterion was easy to meet.

Finally, we looked very closely at the fifth criterion and the potential for cultural and creative exchange to flow from this agreement. Cultural understanding is extremely important – particularly given that it helps to shape views about countries. On the basis of these views, often decisions are made to do business, visit and interact with the people of that country.

Part of the Australian Government's mandate is to promote and celebrate Australian culture in all its forms, and promote exchange with other nations. This includes the promotion of cultural exchange between artists, musicians and film-makers.

The Australian Government was pleased to invite the Director of the National Arts Festival to Australia last year to promote such linkages. As a direct result of this visit, Urban Theatre Projects – an Australian theatre group will perform a play called *Football Diaries* at the festival. The play will also show at the Market Theatre and the Football for Hope festival in early July.

Last year, the Australian High Commission sponsored a visit to South Africa of Australian documentary film-maker, Emma Franz for the Durban International Film Festival. Emma's film *Intangible Asset No. 82* won the best documentary award.

Cultural cooperation is also about showing our **support for each other's cultural heritage.**

I was very honoured to open earlier this week an exhibition showcasing apartheid era art, put together by the *Ifa Lethu Foundation*. The Foundation manages the largest heritage repatriation effort in South Africa, with the repatriated collections now totalling over 320 works from eleven countries. I'm very pleased that individual Australians, notably Diane Johnstone and Bruce Haigh, have played such an integral role in this process.

It is clear from an assessment of these criteria, that it was in Australia's and South Africa's interest to conclude this treaty. **Today's signing marks an important step forward in creative collaboration between our film-makers.**

I expect that it will encourage further film co-productions between Australian and South African film-makers particularly because it will make such undertakings easier.

Under the treaty, some of the practical benefits for film-makers are that film and television projects approved as 'official co-productions will be granted 'national treatment' by both governments meaning co-producers can access a range of benefits including:

- Access to funding and tax benefits;
- Simplified immigration requirements for the entry of skilled personnel;
- Importation of equipment for use in co-productions;
- Official co-productions will be classified as 'local content' under domestic television broadcast quotas.

As an avid cinema-goer, I look forward to seeing some high-quality Australian-South African films in the not-too-distant future – made all the more possible by virtue of this agreement!

And we look forward to continuing our work with the South African Department of Arts and Culture to promote the agreement's use amongst the players that really matter – the film industry.

Thank you.