**SPEECH BY HE GEOFF TOOTH, AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER TO KENYA AT THE LAUNCH OF THE KENYAN AUSTRALIAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, MUTHAIGA 30 APRIL 2013**

* A very big Jumbo and G’day to everyone tonight. For those I haven’t yet had a chance to meet my name is Geoff Tooth and I am Australia’s High Commissioner to Kenya
* My wife Joanne and I are delighted to welcome you all to our house to celebrate the official launch of the **Kenyan Australian Alumni Association**
* Can I particularly warmly thank Ms Njoki Kahiga, Acting Principal Secretary, representing the Ministry of State for Public Service, Kenya for coming tonight
* And acknowledge Mr Mahul Shah, the Interim Chair of the Kenyan Alumni Association and other Committee members present

Ladies and gentlemen.

* We have close to 200 alumni from across 34 Australian universities here tonight, representing some of the best and brightest minds in Kenya. Apparently many other alumni who can’t be with us are also interested in joining but I leave it to Mahul to tell you more about that.
* This is a fantastic start. And music to the ears of a High Commissioner who believes that people to people links are what makes for a strong and deepening bilateral relationship.
* But I must tell you your potential membership is much larger. Kenya is Australia’s biggest source of students on mainland Africa, with nearly 1,800 currently in Australia and many thousands having studied there over recent decades. And nearly 200 Kenyans have been recipients of Australia Awards over the last three years, with more in the pipeline.
* The launch of this association comes at a watershed point in Kenyan and African development and in Australia’s relationship with Kenya. Africa’s future holds immense promise. Kenya’s future holds immense promise. And Australia wants to be part of that. Trade and investment has surged. Australia’s trade with the region has grown at six per cent a year over the past decade. Our development assistance has grown significantly too supporting improved food security, resource development, maternal and child health, water and sanitation, and many other areas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

* As I noted earlier, Australia has been particularly successful at getting Kenyan’s and Africans in general to come and study in our country. The export of education services to Africa has increased by more than 80 % since 2005 and is now Australia’s second largest export to the region, behind only natural resources.There are more than 13,000 African students currently at Australian schools, colleges and universities.
* But up till recently we haven’t been nearly as good at getting you to become alumni and maintain your links with Australia.
* There are so many good reasons for supporting alumni and alumni associations.
* Kenyans like yourselves who have studied in Australia, are a vital bridge in developing the relationship between our two countries.
* Association like this one should give you a forum to network, to do business, to discuss community projects and to maintain your links with Australia.
* So it is a great day when Kenya joins Alumni Associations in Mozambique, Uganda and Zambia that have recently established their own charters.
* And I’m pleased to say that the Australian government intends to remain supportive of existing alumni associations, help establish new ones and provide:
  + Professional development opportunities, such as thematic workshops and conferences; and
  + Small Grants to support the establishment of alumni associations.
* Australia will be doing what we can to encourage you all to stay connected and to keep us abreast of the changes and development contributions you are making in your professional lives.

Ladies and gentlemen

* A few thank yous and acknowledgements. I wish to strongly commend all Representatives of the Interim Committee of the Kenyan Australian Alumni Association for taking the initiative to re-energise the Association.
* It has not been an easy journey and so I would like to thank Mahul in particular for his commitment to getting us to where we are today.
* I also wish to register my appreciation of the work of the Australia Awards team in Nairobi and Adriana Abreu-Combs, current alumni adviser to the Australia Awards program in Africa, who is present here today. Please take advantage of their presence here to learn more about the Awards program and to share your ideas on how to make the KAAA a successful and vibrant association.
* Ladies and gentlemen. I learnt a few new things about the word alumni in preparing this speech. Firstly that the female of you are alumna, and the male alumnus, but if you stand together by your gender you are alumnae and alumni. Rather sexistly you all become alumni when you stand together. But more relevantly I learnt that alumni comes from a Latin verb meaning to nourish and alumni literally means nourished ones.
* I hope that Australia was indeed able to provide you the educational and social nourishment you needed and the Association will be a key part of your future health and prosperity.
* And I also hope that you are all now ready and willing to help nourish this Association, to nourish those that follow in your path to Australia and to nourish the relationship between Kenya and Australia.
* I would now like to invite Ms Njoki Kahiga, Acting Principal Secretary, representing the Ministry of State for Public Service, to say a few words on behalf of the Australia Award recipients, and thereafter call upon Mr Mahul Shah to say a few words on behalf of the Alumni community gathered here today and a bit more about the vision of the Kenyan Australian Alumni Association.
* Welcome Ms Kahiga.