**SPEECH BY HE GEOFF TOOTH, AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER TO KENYA**

**AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY OF A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE SYSTEM FOR LAND-BASED EMISSIONS IN KENYA (SLEEK)**

**FRIDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2014, PANAFRIC HOTEL, NAIROBI**

Dr Richard Lesiyampe, Principal Secretary, Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Jackson Kimani, Country Director, Clinton Climate Initiative

Secretaries

Representatives of the many organisations involved in SLEEK,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be here today at this important event and honoured to be given the chance to speak. It is also very pleasing to see so many representatives from key Kenyan agencies here to witness this MOU signing. I hope you were able to convince your loved ones that this was an event that justified such an early start on Valentine’s Day.

For it is indeed a vital issue we are all working to address here. Vital for Kenya, vital for the world.

As Professor Wangari Maathai, your Nobel prize winner and one of my heroes, said, “It is a matter of life and death for this country. The Kenyan forests are facing extinction and it is a man-made problem.”

Forests in Kenya provide critical ecosystem goods and services – they mitigate climate change, prevent land degradation, regulate water supply, and support biodiversity.

However, these forests are being rapidly lost and degraded and only 4.4 per cent of the country is now under forest and tree cover.

This is leading to negative impacts such as food insecurity, climate change vulnerability, and increased greenhouse gas emissions. Without successful interventions these impacts will worsen.

Accurate, timely, public and systematic data on forest and land-use are critical for understanding the issues and responding through appropriate policies and well designed and implemented interventions.

The System for Land-based Emissions Estimation in Kenya – SLEEK – will build Kenya’s technical capacity to provide this information, which in turn will help reduce forest degradation, plan for forest restoration and protection, manage land use and improve food security.

Australia is proud to be working with the Government of Kenya on these important issues. We are recognised as a global leader on national carbon accounting for the land sector.

We hope that our experiences in developing our own system, including the mistakes we have made and lessons we have learnt along the way, will help the Government of Kenya to develop SLEEK as a world class system. Already there has been a lot of robust engagement between Kenyan and Australian technical experts in laying the foundations for this program.

Australia is also very pleased to be working with the Clinton Climate Initiative (CCI), a Clinton Foundation initiative. CCI has expertise in the development of measurement, reporting and verification systems and a well-established working relationship with the Government of Kenya.

The commitment of the Governments of Kenya and Australia and CCI to this program will help to make SLEEK a successful and powerful system for the people of Kenya.

In doing so, this will help the Government deliver its objectives for a clean, secure sustainable environment by 2030 in line with the Medium Term Plan for 2013-17.

Importantly, SLEEK will also contribute to economic growth and food security through improved land management, increased agricultural productivity and better water availability.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today.