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**Speech by HE Geoff Tooth, Australian High Commissioner to Kenya at the Opening Ceremony of the Wanawake kwa Wanawake Family Centre, 4 December 2013**

Marguerite Ryan

Sister Leonida

Sister Loretta

Brother Russell Peters

Distinguished guests, fellow Australians, ladies and gentlemen,

What a wonderful Christmas present for Kibera and Nairobi.

Thank you so much for the warmth of your welcome today and giving me the honour of speaking on behalf on the Australian people and government.

I am well aware of the many struggles and the immense amount of work that has taken place to get the Centre to this point. Can I congratulate all involved, to the Christian Brothers, to Marguerite and her many generous supporters – supporters like Paul and Pam Vanderzalm who are here today - to the community workers and teachers, to all the dedicated Kenyans and Australians who have worked so tirelessly over many years to realise this dream. You should all feel a great sense of accomplishment at what you have achieved.

Wanawake kwa Wanawake has come such a long way since, back in 2003, Brother Frank Chappell expressed his concern at the number of desperate mothers seeking assistance in order to educate their children. Marguerite Ryan in Australia heard this call and with the help of Mary Campbell founded an organisation called ‘Women for Women in Africa’. Donations from well-wishers in Australia were sent to create the office, which quickly evolved into the fully-fledged charity we see today, supporting education sponsorships, the Chappell Informal School, and a women’s literacy and empowerment program.

The Centre has already transformed lives – like those of Joyce and Davina whose stories are on the Women for Women in Africa website - and will, I’m sure, change many more.

Community is such an important part of the story of the Centre. And I must say that the Australian High Commission couldn’t be such a strong supporter if it wasn’t. We know from our experience elsewhere in Africa, in Asia, in the Pacific and in Australia itself, that if an organisation or project isn’t firmly immersed into the community, if it is not supported strongly by the community, it will not survive, it will not be sustainable and it will not achieve its potential. I am very confident that this Centre will continue to do all that. It will continue to cater to the needs of the residents and offer even more activities and opportunities that will contribute to the empowerment of mothers and their children.

To all residents gathered here today, may this Centre continue to be a place that allows you to empower yourselves by learning new skills that you can use to better your lives and the lives of others. To the mothers, I hope this Centre will bring you more skills and opportunities that can earn an income and lead to independence for you and your family. To the children - you are the future of Kibera, of Nairobi and of Kenya and may you continue to shine brightly in this community. May you become the next leaders and driving development of this great country as it moves into towards hundred years as an independent nation. To Christian Brothers and all the Australians involved, thank you for doing something so worthwhile, so transformational. The Australian High Commission, the Australian Government and the Australian people are very proud of the role they have played in the Centre and we know this is just the start of another important chapter in the story of our involvement.

Asanteni sana and long live the Wanawake kwa Wanawake Family Centre!