

Tabled in the Parliament on
23 October 1997

(21 Oct 97
in Senate)

The Australian Government response

to

the report of the

**Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and
Trade**

Australia's Relations with Southern Africa

October 1997

INTRODUCTION

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) tabled its report *Australia's Relations with Southern Africa* on 2 December 1996. The Australian Government's response to the recommendations of the report follow.

The Government would like to commend the Chairman and members of the JSCFADT on their report on Australian relations with Southern Africa. The report is thorough and balanced. It makes proposals to advance our relations with the region across the board. The report also highlights the range and scope of Australian interests in Southern Africa. The wider Australian public has been well-informed on recent political developments in South Africa, but this report provides us with a more penetrating and more thoughtful assessment of the full range of developments in the region, their relevance to Australia, and the ways in which Australian interests might best be protected and promoted in Southern Africa.

CHAPTER 2: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SADC

Recommendation 1

The Australian Parliament and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, explore ways in which appropriate assistance might be provided to the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Over the period 1994-96, AusAID provided training attachments to the Australian Parliament for 2-4 members of the SADC Parliamentary Forum per annum. These attachments have proved successful, in passing on information and expertise, in developing contacts and in generating goodwill.

The Government has announced the establishment of a Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) that will focus on fostering the development of democratic processes and institutions. This will involve providing practical training and technical assistance relating to issues such as electoral and parliamentary procedures. This institution could provide good governance assistance to the SADC Parliamentary Forum and/or SADC member countries.

Recommendation 2

Australia respond positively to future requests from SADC for assistance, particularly in institutional strengthening.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

The findings of the independent review of Australia's foreign aid program, the Simons review, were announced in May 1997. Subject to the Government's consideration of the review's recommendations and subsequent budgetary outcomes, the Government will consider requests from SADC for assistance, particularly in institutional strengthening.

Recommendation 3

Australia review its diplomatic coverage of Southern Africa with a view to:

- (a) establishing other forms of diplomatic representation (eg. sharing facilities with another country, mini-embassies, or creating Honorary Consul positions);*
- (b) providing additional staffing to the Australian High Commission in Harare; and*
- (c) in the longer term, opening an additional post, to be located in one of the smaller Southern African nations eg. Angola.*

Response

Agreed in part

Comment

The Government has under constant review Australia's network of overseas posts, including in Southern Africa. At the present time the Government does not intend to open additional posts in the Southern African region, nor does it intend to provide additional staff to the Australian High Commission in Harare.

Alternative forms of Australian diplomatic representation are being created in Southern Africa to provide a greater Australian presence in the region. One mechanism may be the establishment of honorary consuls. The first honorary consul appointment was made for Durban, in July 1997. Another, already now often used from Harare, is to link visits by the High Commissioner specifically to support for Australian trade initiatives or investment projects in other countries of accreditation.

CHAPTER 3: OTHER REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Recommendation 4

Australia offer encouragement and further practical help to the OAU, if requested, to assist in the development of good governance in Africa, particularly Southern Africa, through exploring alternative conflict resolution strategies.

Response

Agreed in principle.

Comment

Section 3.8 of the JSCFADT report indicates that AusAID provided \$225,000 in 1996 for three African peace initiatives. Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, AusAID will consider further assistance to the OAU for suitable proposals.

Recommendation 5

Australia explore with other participants mechanisms to include the hinterland countries reliant on access to the Indian Ocean in future IOR dialogues.

Response

Agreed in part

Comment

Australia is involved in two separate but parallel initiatives being pursued in the Indian Ocean region. The first, earlier known as the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative but launched formally as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) in March 1997, is an intergovernmental dialogue process involving 14 Indian Ocean island and littoral states. The second process, launched at the International Forum on the Indian Ocean Region (IFIOR) in Perth in June 1995, now known as the "second track", comprises region-wide academic and business networks which met again in Durban in March 1997.

The second track is open to all academics and business people, whether from hinterland, rim or island Indian Ocean States. There are no formal mechanisms required to join the process. The hinterland countries of Southern Africa are welcome to join the second track process.

In the IOR-ARC, the first priority will be to ensure that the major economies of the Indian Ocean rim are included. As expansion of the Association has been contested by some members and any decisions in the Association must be made by consensus, the inclusion of new states may take some time. After the main states of the Indian Ocean rim are included, it will then be appropriate for Australia, with other IOR-ARC members, to consider mechanisms to include hinterland states of Southern Africa which are reliant on access to the Indian Ocean.

CHAPTER 4: SECURITY ISSUES

Recommendation 6

Australia offer increased expert assistance to the fledgling democracies in the Southern African region in such fields as constitutional drafting and electoral law.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Contributing to democratisation is one of the objectives of the aid program to Southern Africa. In pursuit of this objective, AusAID has provided assistance through the Commonwealth Secretariat to support constitutional development and electoral management in South Africa. The Australian Electoral Commission has made a sustained and highly effective contribution to assistance with African elections.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government may consider supporting similar initiatives.

Recommendation 7

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, AusAID and the Australian Electoral Commission develop an ongoing program of assistance in the area of electoral reform and development.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

AusAID, in conjunction with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and DFAT, has provided funds for a number of electoral reform and development activities undertaken by the AEC at the request of recipient SADC governments and by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider further initiatives.

Recommendation 8

AusAID, in conjunction with Southern African authorities, consider including provision of some legal education and training, and assistance to establish legal resource centres, as part of the official development assistance program.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider this recommendation further.

Recommendation 9

Australia encourage an increased regional dialogue through support in the institutional strengthening of organisations such as SADC.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider this recommendation further. The institutional strengthening of institutions such as SADC may form part of the activities of the proposed Centre for Democratic Institutions (referred to earlier under Recommendation 1).

Recommendation 10

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade monitor the development of ASAS and offer assistance as appropriate.

Response

Agreed in part

Comment

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will continue to monitor the formation and development of all significant groups and associations within Southern Africa, including the Association of Southern African States (ASAS). As a regional security organisation, ASAS remains in an embryonic state under the wings of SADC and it remains unclear what assistance ASAS may seek from Australia. It is not known whether ASAS would be receptive to Australian advice on the workings of preventive diplomacy centres.

Given the geographic distance between Australia and Southern Africa, Australia is not currently seeking to develop strategic or operational links with Southern African countries or

with multilateral organisations in the region such as ASAS. Requests for peace building or humanitarian assistance will be considered on a case-by-case basis if the issues fall within Australia's broader national goals and in accordance with our standard criteria.

Recommendation 11

Australia explore through the International Forum on the Indian Ocean Rim greater cultural exchanges and trade links.

Response

Agreed in principle in terms of business and academic links.

Comment

Australia is participating in two inter-related initiatives in the Indian Ocean region (see recommendation 5), including the International Forum on the Indian Ocean Region (IFIOR) launched at the Australian Government's instigation in Perth in 1995. At that conference, Indian Ocean academic and business networks were launched. The networks met in New Delhi in December 1995 and again in Durban in March 1997. The networks comprise independent academics and business representatives and their meetings are not intended to have an intergovernmental component. The networks are specifically intended to enhance economic and trade cooperation among countries of the region and Australians participating in the networks are working towards that goal. The development of cultural exchange in the region is a by-product of the networks rather than a primary objective. While the Australian Government does not have a direct role in setting the networks' agendas - the networks are part of the "second track" process which currently operates on a non-governmental basis - it will continue to offer such assistance, as it is able, to the networks' operation.

CHAPTER 6: AUSTRALIA'S TRADE AND INVESTMENT WITH SOUTHERN AFRICA

Recommendation 12

Australia, as part of its assistance to South Africa, include training for small and medium businesses.

Response

Agreed

Comment

AusAID funds a Private Sector Linkages Program (PSLP) in South Africa. Eligible activities for funding through PSLP include training for small and medium businesses. AusAID also supports a number of micro-enterprise development projects in South Africa and Zimbabwe which in turn support small and emerging enterprises.

Recommendation 13

Australia mount a public information campaign in Southern Africa aimed at highlighting the opportunities for business and other contact such as tourism with Australia.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

An integral part of the ongoing activity of Australian government agencies (eg DFAT, Austrade, the Australian Tourist Commission) is a public information campaign in Southern Africa to rectify misperceptions about the nature of the Australian economy and the range of our products, including tourism (see also recommendations 23 and 24). In 1996, a major promotion, Australia Week in South Africa, achieved extensive and positive media coverage. Mr Fischer's visit to Southern Africa in July 1997 generated extensive, and consistently favourable, publicity about Australian economic opportunities and prospects.

Recommendation 14 (i)

Australia bring forward the timetable for conclusion of a Double Taxation Treaty and an Investment Protection Agreement with South Africa.

Response

Agreed in principle.

Comment

Australia and South Africa have commenced negotiations to complete a comprehensive Double Taxation Agreement (DTA) as soon as possible. A second round of DTA talks had been proposed for February 1997, however the South African Revenue Service (SARS) requested the talks be delayed. The delay has been caused by a restructure of SARS. The senior SARS officers who will lead the South African delegation at the DTA talks were unable to participate in the talks planned for February as they were needed for implementation of the SARS restructure. Australia remains committed to the early conclusion of the DTA with South Africa, but this can only be achieved on a bilateral basis. Following discussion on this issue at the first Joint Ministerial Commission with South Africa in July 1997, Ministers agreed to expedite negotiations on the DTA. Negotiations in Pretoria in September 1997 were successfully concluded with the initialling of a draft agreement by the leaders of the Australian and South African negotiating teams.

Australia and South Africa have exchanged their respective model Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (IPPA) as a basis for further discussion.

Recommendation 14(ii)

Australia encourage normalisation of currency and exchange agreements and harmonisation of regulatory and other requirements within SADC countries.

Response

Agreed in part

Comment

The normalisation of currency and exchange agreements and the harmonisation of regulatory arrangements within SADC countries is principally a matter for those countries. However, there may be scope for Australia to make a useful contribution on some of these issues, or to other aspects of regional economic integration, in the course of its activities as a member of various international institutions and organisations.

Recommendation 15

Austrade review its current staffing allocation to Southern Africa with a view to appointing an A-based officer to have responsibility for those countries covered by the Australian post in Zimbabwe.

Response

Agreed in part

Comment

Austrade continually monitors the disposition of its overseas resources in line with its mission of 'helping win business overseas and helping to bring investment to Australia'. It is clear Australian business has been making impressive gains in South Africa in the past few years, particularly in the export of Elaborately Transformed Manufactures (ETMs). Austrade has helped many companies penetrate the South African market.

There is evidence to indicate that the export successes achieved by Australian companies in South Africa have flowed into other Southern African countries as Australian goods are carried into the region by the distribution networks of South African companies representing Australian companies in South Africa. Accordingly, the resources devoted by Austrade to South Africa have resultant benefits in other parts of Southern Africa.

Austrade plans to take advantage of its new computer-based client information management systems to distribute enquiries from Southern Africa to Australian companies more expeditiously and extensively. Steps will be taken to develop close cooperation between Austrade Johannesburg and Australia's other posts in sub-Saharan Africa to gain maximum benefit from the new systems. The Government considers the likely return from these measures will be more cost effective than the resource intensive allocation of an A-based Austrade officer in Zimbabwe.

At a meeting of African Heads of Mission in July, Heads of Mission discussed with Austrade other, practical ways to upgrade Austrade activities in Southern Africa.

Recommendation 16

Austrade conduct a study on the publicising and implementation of EMDG with special reference to Australian companies trading with Southern Africa

Response

Not agreed

Comment

The Export Market Development Grant (EMDG) scheme is global in nature and does not discriminate between markets. The scheme has been available for many years and its existence is well known among the Australian export community. Austrade continues to promote the scheme - particularly through its Australian network - to reach new exporters. Given that EMDG is a global program that is promoted continuously, it is not appropriate specifically to target companies interested in Southern Africa.

Recommendation 17

Austrade produce a brochure for Australian companies interested in trading with Southern Africa, setting out basic information about the market, and assistance available to potential exporters.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Subject to the availability of resources, Austrade will take steps to produce brief guides for Australian companies containing information on Southern African markets. These guides will be produced for each market where Austrade considers the market opportunities for Australian interests warrant their production. For the first Joint Ministerial Commission with South Africa, DFAT and Austrade published a review of the commercial relationship between Australia and South Africa, with a particular emphasis on doing business in South Africa and on key opportunities for Australian business. At that JMC, Ministers agreed to produce jointly a detailed study of synergies and complementarities between the two economies.

Recommendation 18

Austrade participate in the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair in 1997 and 1998, and review the degree of business interest after that period.

Response

Not agreed

Comment

The Australian business community values the participation of Austrade in trade displays in South Africa. While Austrade is keen to take advantage of all available trade promotion opportunities in the region, under current circumstances it would be difficult to warrant the diversion of resources currently used in South Africa to enable Australian participation in other trade displays (such as the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair). Regional economic growth patterns will require a regular review of the prospects for trade in various sectors and countries and a consideration of the most suitable manner to promote Australian companies. In this regard, it is noted that the Zimbex Trade Fair in Harare is competing with the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair to become the premier trade display in Zimbabwe. In July 1997, the Minister for Trade, Mr Tim Fischer, led a very successful Australian agricultural business delegation to Zimbabwe. This sort of targeted approach to specific sectoral opportunities will pay more dividends than a broad-brush approach to trade fairs.

CHAPTER 7: NICHE MARKETS

Recommendation 19

Australia encourage an increase in the number of study exchanges between SADC and Australian educational institutions.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

AusAID is funding a \$5 million institutional links project in South Africa to promote linkages between South African and Australian higher education institutions. Australian tertiary institutions are also developing their own links with South Africa.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider this recommendation.

Recommendation 20

Australia establish a formal exchange program between employees of the public and corporate sectors of SADC countries and Australia, with an emphasis on the industry specialist areas of infrastructure, education and agriculture.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

In South Africa, AusAID's Public Sector Support Program involves regular exchanges between Australia and South African personnel in a range of sectors. These include education, water and sanitation, health, and statistics. Similarly, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) has implemented exchanges in the agriculture sector.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider further initiatives.

Recommendation 21

Australia fund a small investigative team representing nationwide Technical and Further Education and training institutions, to undertake a feasibility study of SADC countries with the view to setting up vocational education and training programs supported by Australia.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider this recommendation further.

In November 1996 AusAID funded an education and training study mission to assist in developing a strategy that aims to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of Australian education and training assistance to Africa. The mission's report will shortly be considered by Government.

Recommendation 22

Australia facilitate a thorough assessment and analysis of potential business and management training programs and services for prospective or present indigenous national business owners and managers.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

The Government supports the need for a better understanding of South Africa's business and management training needs, carried out under Australia's development assistance program but recommends that efforts to institute programs in this area be linked directly to Australian investment and business interests.

One of South Africa's leading business figures, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, also pursued and publicised links with the black economic empowerment schemes during a visit to Australia in

December 1996. A leading African business figure also addressed the first Australia-South Africa Joint Ministerial Commission.

Recommendation 23

The Australian Tourist Commission review its location, staffing and promotional activities in Southern Africa with a view to raising its visibility.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

The Australian Tourist Commission (ATC) regularly monitors the effectiveness of all marketing strategies undertaken and in particular the impact of specific consumer marketing tactics in each market through its various advertising, international publicity and production programs. This regular monitoring includes consideration of location and staffing resources within given budgetary constraints, while taking into account factors such as high yield markets and segments of greatest tourism potential for Australia.

This regular monitoring also enables the ATC to be flexible in the marketing strategies it undertakes and to adopt changes where review processes highlight the availability of tourism opportunities. If opportunities are revealed, supplementary marketing strategies are implemented and re-allocation of resources is undertaken.

These reviews have confirmed that Southern Africa is an emerging market with strong potential for future tourism activities. The ATC is committed to this market and current marketing strategies are focusing on enhancing this tourism potential by creating awareness of Australia as a holiday destination among the overseas travel industry and ensuring that Australian tourism products are being widely distributed. The ATC remains committed to marketing activities in Southern Africa within the constraints of its funding base.

Recommendation 24

The Department of Industry, Science and Tourism and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade explore with the South African and Zimbabwe governments a Memorandum of Understanding on tourism cooperation.

Response

Agreed in principle but not pursued under current circumstances

Comment

The Office of National Tourism of the Department of Industry, Science and Tourism explores opportunities for tourism cooperation with other countries, including the export of tourism training and education services. In cases where barriers exist, the Office of National Tourism

has facilitated the entry of the Australian industry into foreign markets under the auspices of specific bilateral agreements.

Australia's tourism relations with South Africa and Zimbabwe are not yet sufficient to warrant the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding on tourism with each country. Australia's tourism relations with all of Southern Africa continue to be monitored, including an assessment of the commercial benefits and other opportunities to be gained through the implementation of formal bilateral agreements on tourism cooperation. In the meantime, there may be merit in promoting the export of tourism education and training services to Southern Africa through existing mechanisms for the general exchange of education and training services.

The Joint Ministerial Commission with South Africa in July 1997 provided an opportunity for extensive discussions on tourism issues between the Australian Minister for Industry, Science and Tourism and the South African Minister and Deputy Minister of Tourism.

Recommendation 25

Austrade research the potential niche markets for Australia in SADC countries.

Response

Agreed

Comment

As well as promoting South Africa as a dynamic potential market in its own right, Austrade also promotes South Africa as a springboard into the Southern African region, particularly SADC countries. In August 1997 Austrade ran a seminar series in major Australian capitals to promote trade and investment opportunities in the sub-Saharan region, with particular emphasis on the important South African market and its 'springboard' role. Assistance was also given in 1996 to an investment promotion mission from the Zimbabwe mining sector.

CHAPTER 8: AUSTRALIA'S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Recommendation 26

Australia reaffirm its commitment to the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for official development purposes.

Response

Response under review

Comment

Australia's commitment to the 0.7 per cent of GNP target is being considered by the Government in light of the Simons review.

Recommendation 27

AusAID in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade examine the new aid policy for Africa, announced in August 1995, with a view to determining its effectiveness and scope.

Response

Agreed

Comment

The framework will be reviewed in the context of the Simons review.

Recommendation 28

Australia in international fora, explore ways in which the indebtedness of Southern African countries can be alleviated.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

The Australian Government has actively supported international debt relief for heavily indebted poor developing countries which have demonstrated a willingness to undertake the necessary economic reforms, but whose social and economic development is constrained by unsustainable levels of debt. In particular, the Government supports the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Debt Initiative, which involves cooperation between the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Paris Club to alleviate the debt burden of such countries in Southern Africa and elsewhere.

CHAPTER 9: SPECIAL ISSUES

Recommendation 29

Health issues continue to be addressed by AusAID and relevant NGOs with an emphasis on the provision of sanitation, safe water supply and basic health services.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Health issues are a major focus of the Australian program of assistance to Southern Africa. Health is a priority under the bilateral programs for Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. AusAID is currently funding a number of projects in sanitation, safe water supply and basic health services in these three countries. In addition, under the Southern Africa NGO Participation Program (SANGOP), AusAID is supporting a number of health projects managed by Australian NGOs in Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, further activities will be considered.

Recommendation 30

Australia continue to fund HIV/AIDS education programs aimed, in particular, at adolescents and young adults in urban areas where infection rates are higher than those in rural communities.

Response

Agreed

Comment

The Government recognises the gravity and urgency of the HIV/AIDS problem in Africa. In January 1997 the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced mechanisms for expenditure of the \$10 million HIV/AIDS Care and Prevention initiative for Africa. Some activities funded as a result of this initiative will address the problem of AIDS in urban communities.

Recommendation 31

Australia ensure funding is allocated through AusAID and NGOs for the establishment and continuation of hospices and orphanages for infants and children such as those suffering from HIV/AIDS and those orphaned as a result of the disease.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider this recommendation further.

Recommendation 32

Any Australian Government funding for NGO family planning programs in SADC countries should ensure that these are culturally sensitive, fully in conformity with our legal principles of informed consent, free from any coercive policies or practices which prevent couples exercising true freedom of choice in determining family size, have regard to the human rights records of the countries concerned, and not involve abortion or abortion drugs.

Response

Agreed

Comment

As with all AusAID programs, only activities which fully meet the Government's stringent guidelines will be funded.

Recommendation 33

AusAID continue to include a focus on education and training in its programs, with an increased emphasis in the areas of basic education and vocational and technical education.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

As discussed under Recommendation 21, the Government will shortly be considering a review of Australian education and training assistance to Africa.

Recommendation 34

Australian universities and TAFEs collectively promote the opportunities for education (both in-country and in Australia) to Southern African countries.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

The Government supports any initiative by Australian universities and TAFEs to promote education opportunities in the region. The Australian International Education Foundation (AIEF) will commission and publish market research to help Australia's higher education and technical and vocational education sectors make informed judgments of opportunities in Southern Africa. Also, the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) employs a part-time education program officer in the Australian High Commission in Pretoria to promote education opportunities in Australia.

Recommendation 35

AusAID provide funding to SADC for the establishment of a 'micro-enterprise program' for the women of Southern Africa, enabling them to borrow capital to establish livelihood projects.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

AusAID is currently funding two micro-enterprise development programs under the NGO program, one in Zimbabwe and one in South Africa. The Zimbabwe project has been running for almost two years. Under this project, 78% of loans have been provided to women. AusAID has also funded several integrated micro-enterprise projects specifically for women in Botswana, Mozambique and Tanzania through Australian NGOs and UNICEF.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government may consider further initiatives.

Recommendation 36

The issue of women's health continue to be addressed by AusAID and NGOs, with an emphasis on the provision of sanitation and water, maternal and infant health services, family planning services, and health education particularly relevant to HIV/AIDS.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Health, in particular women and children's health, is a priority sector for Australia's aid to Southern Africa. AusAID currently funds a number of NGO and bilateral projects which address a range of women's and children's health issues.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider this recommendation further.

Recommendation 37

Funding and aid support continue to be provided through AusAID and NGOs to provide access to education for all children, regardless of gender.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

Such funding will be subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability.

Recommendation 38

Australia continue to work for a total ban on landmines.

Response

Agreed

Comment

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer, and the Minister for Defence, Mr Ian McLachlan, made a joint announcement on 15 April 1996 that Australia supports a global ban on the production, stockpiling, use and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. In the same statement, it was announced that the operational use of anti-personnel landmines by the Australian Defence Force was indefinitely suspended. This suspension would be reviewed in the case of a substantial deterioration in our strategic circumstances in which Australia's security was under threat and denial of an anti-personnel landmine capability to the Australian Defence Force would result in additional Australian casualties and damage to vital infrastructure.

Australia called for a global ban on landmines at the third and final session of the Inhumane Weapons Convention Review Conference held in Geneva in April/May 1996. The Government was disappointed that the Conference failed to support Australia's position but remains committed to pursuing such an outcome. The Conference did achieve the adoption of an amended Protocol II to the Inhumane Weapons Convention which contains stronger restrictions and prohibitions on the use and transfer of landmines and provides better protection for civilians and peacekeeping forces than the existing Protocol (to which Australia

is already a party). Following scrutiny by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties and subsequent Executive Council approval, Australia's instrument of consent to be bound by amended Protocol II was deposited with the United Nations Secretary-General on 22 August 1997.

In international fora, the Australian Government will continue to support the growing international movement in favour of eliminating anti-personnel landmines as a weapon of war. Australia took part in the international conference of pro-ban states and non-government groups in Ottawa in October 1996 which looked at future strategies for achieving a ban. Australia also co-sponsored the historic resolution adopted at the 51st session of the United Nations General Assembly in which, for the first time, the Assembly called for the vigorous pursuit of negotiations for a global ban on anti-personnel landmines. The resolution, adopted on 14 November 1996, attracted 115 co-sponsors and was supported by an overwhelming majority of states. The breadth of support shown by the vote is testimony to the strength of international feeling against landmines and reinforces efforts to rid the world of these insidious weapons which kill or maim some 30,000 people a year. In Mr Downer's address to the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva on 30 January 1997, he called on that body to deliver a treaty banning anti-personnel landmines in a timeframe commensurate with the scale and urgency of the problem. In 1997, Australia campaigned vigorously in the Conference on Disarmament for the commencement of negotiations on a ban and held the position of CD Special Coordinator on this issue from June until the end of the CD's 1997 session.

In addition, Australia has participated fully in the international meetings and negotiations held in 1997 under the auspices of the "Ottawa Process" - a Canadian-sponsored initiative which has, in an ad hoc forum of countries currently committed to a ban on anti-personnel landmines, finalised a ban treaty for signature in Ottawa in December 1997. The question of Australia's signing the Ottawa Treaty is being considered by Ministers.

Australia remains committed to working in all relevant international fora towards the goal of an effective ban on anti-personnel landmines that is global in scope, binding and verifiable. Australia is also committed to the important concomitant task of enhanced international contributions to de-mining and mine victim assistance programs. Since May 1996, Australia has committed over \$19 million to such programs in Cambodia, Laos, Afghanistan, Mozambique and Angola.

Recommendation 39

Australia continue to provide assistance through government and NGO agencies to SADC countries for demining activities. Such assistance should encompass:

- (a) medical and rehabilitation assistance to landmine victims, including the supply of prostheses to victims;*
- (b) community education on the dangers of landmines; and*
- (c) training for local people in demining methods.*

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

In 1995/96 the Government allocated \$700,000 to demining activities in Mozambique. As part of a recent announcement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, an additional \$220,000 has been allocated to landmine detection in Mozambique. Demining in Angola received \$550,000 in 1995.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider this recommendation further.

The Government is also looking at ways in which improved de-mining technology can speed up the rate and scale of the de-mining process. To that end, Mr Downer put forward a proposal at the 51st UN General Assembly for enhanced international cooperation in the area of de-mining technology. He has also drawn attention to breakthrough de-mining technology, developed jointly by the Defence Science and Technology Organisation, CSIRO and industry, which has the potential to make mine detection faster and more reliable.

The Department of Defence is willing to examine proposals for training local people in demining methods on a case-by-case basis subject to funding availability and taking into account, when evaluating such requests, Australia's peacekeeping criteria.

CHAPTER 10: BUILDING ON THE RELATIONSHIP

Recommendation 40

Australia establish a mechanism to assist associations such as the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, but more broadly NGOs, develop an interchange program with the countries of Southern Africa.

Response

Agreed in principle

Comment

There are already two AusAID programs that facilitate linkages between Australian and developing country associations, namely the International Seminar Support Scheme (ISSS) and the Professional Associations International Development Scheme (PAIDS). ISSS provides a mechanism for funding members of associations to attend seminars related to social and/or economic development issues. PAIDS supports activities of Australian professional associations to strengthen the professional capacities of their counterparts in developing countries.

Subject to the Government's consideration of the Simons review recommendations and funding availability, the Government will consider this recommendation further.

Recommendation 41

The Commonwealth Government be prepared to consider any feasibility study submitted by the Western Australian Government and the University of Western Australia and Curtin University on establishing a Centre for African Studies in Western Australia.

Response

Agreed

Comment

The Government will consider without commitment any study on the establishment of a centre for African Studies in Western Australia. Such a submission will be considered in the context of priorities for the development of Australia's education and training priorities for Africa and its commitment to initiatives that may exist or arise in other fora addressing human resource development in the Indian Ocean and Africa regions.

Recommendation 42

Australia support cultural exchanges with Southern Africa and set up a liaison with the Australia Southern Africa Business Council (Inc) through which requests for assistance can be channelled.

Response

Agreed in part

Comment

The Government encourages cultural and sporting exchanges between Australia and Southern Africa and appreciates the role of the Australia South Africa Business Council in facilitating such exchanges.

The objective of the cultural relations program run by DFAT is to project a contemporary image of Australia overseas in support of our economic and foreign policy interests.

Funding under the program for the whole of Africa is of the order of \$40,000. To ensure these limited funds are used effectively and efficiently they are devolved to Australia's posts in Africa for them to use as creatively as possible consistent with the program's objectives. Activities supported by posts would be limited to those which sought to demonstrate Australian excellence (not simply endeavour) in a way which meets objectives of the cultural relations program. The High Commissions in South Africa and Zimbabwe place priority on activities that support Australia's interests in Southern Africa, including economic interests. These High Commissions consider such programs have a positive impact on their commercial operations. Given the very limited amount available, priority is placed on promoting Australian product into South Africa. Bringing Africans and their products to Australia is a promotional role primarily for African government and non-government sectors to fulfil.

The relevant national bilateral business councils in Southern Africa and Australia may wish to develop a joint strategy regarding cultural exchange which enables them to prioritise the

activities they wish to develop and takes into account the issue of funding. The Government encourages any program such as this.