I am delighted to assume the role of High Commissioner to Nigeria, with accreditation to ECOWAS, as well as the Republics of Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, Benin, Niger and the Gambia at this important time in our engagement with West Africa. The popularity of our Australia Awards program, our increasing interaction in the mining sector, and our growing officials level exchanges testify to a new and promising period in our presence in Africa. I am very pleased to also be in the region at a time when Australia will be undertaking its role as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, for the 2013-14 term. It will be particularly important during this time that we listen to our friends in the region whose views will inform us as we participate in the UNSC deliberations.

This is also something of a homecoming for me to this region, having spent a rewarding period as High Commissioner in Accra, prior to returning to Canberra. I am very excited by this opportunity to continue working in West and Central Africa, a region which contains so much potential, talent and resources.

Finally, to the Australian community throughout the region, I look forward to an early opportunity to meet up with you. In particular, I note the important work of our Honorary Consul in Lagos, Alan Davies, who has done a great job in reaching out to the Australian community in southern Nigeria, and I look forward to soon formalising the appointment of the new Honorary Consul to Cameroon.

With my best wishes
Jon Richardson
High Commissioner

Mr Richardson on a project visit to northern Ghana during his posting as High Commissioner in Accra
Farewell message from outgoing High Commissioner Ian McConville

We are sad to be heading away from Nigeria after a memorable posting in this fascinating part of the world. As with any posting, the sweetest memories are with the wonderful people we have met in our work in Abuja, across Nigeria, and more broadly in the region. It has been humbling to see the warmth and hospitality that has been extended to myself, my wife Libby, and our three children on so many occasions. We would particularly like to acknowledge the terrific staff at the Australian High Commission in Abuja. It has indeed been a privilege to work with such a talented, committed and professional team and we will miss them dearly. If we, as Team Australia, have done a small part in opening the door for increased engagement between Australia and the region, then “mission accomplished”. We look forward to maintaining contact in the future, and we hope that you have a safe and rewarding 2013.

Ian McConville

Foreign Minister Bob Carr appoints a new High Commissioner - welcome to Jon Richardson

On 1 November 2012, Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr announced Mr Jon Richardson as Australia’s next High Commissioner to Nigeria, with non-resident accreditation to the Republics of Benin, Congo, Cameroon, Gabon, Niger and the Gambia. Mr Richardson commenced his appointment in January 2013, replacing Mr Ian McConville.

Mr Richardson is a career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and has previously served as High Commissioner to Ghana and Director of the Africa Section in DFAT. He was most recently Director of the Department’s Resources and Business Liaison Section, representing Australia in such bodies as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Kimberley Process on conflict diamonds. Mr Richardson has also served as Counsellor at the Australian High Commission in London, working on African and Commonwealth issues, and at Australian Embassies in Moscow and Belgrade.

Mr Richardson holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree from the Australian National University and a Master of Business Administration from Henley Management College in the UK. He speaks French and Russian.

We at the Australian High Commission wish Mr Richardson a very warm welcome to Abuja and a rewarding posting!
Projects recently funded through the DAP

Beekeeping in Kaduna state

The Zaria-based NGO Beekeeping Extension Society trained 20 rural women in Anguwan Dan-Asabe, Kaduna state, in modern beekeeping and honey production in commercial quantities. The DAP made this poverty alleviation project possible by funding the necessary equipment including top bar hives, trap hives, bee suits, veils and hats, boots, hand gloves, hive tools, bellow smokers and baiting materials.

School renovation in Osun state

In Ijebu-Jesa, Osun state, our DAP funds were put to colourful use, assisting the implementing NGO Bridge Initiative for African Development with the renovation of four classroom blocks and the construction of two toilets for the students of the community-based Urban Day Grammar school, established in 1978.
The Australian Lapdesk Project

The lapdesk is a light and durable platform designed to provide a writing surface for children with no access to a classroom desk, and to support their teachers in making writing a central part of the curriculum. Lapdesks can easily be taken home in the evenings and become a point of pride for students. They don’t replace good school furniture, but they represent a cost-effective interim solution for children studying in substandard conditions.

The Australian High Commission in Abuja has commissioned Kommunity Desks to produce almost 4000 lapdesks to be distributed to schools in the region. This program is jointly funded through the DAP and the AACGS. Each lapdesk is designed with basic facts about Australia and the host country, including maps and national anthems. Australian-funded lapdesks have already been presented to students in Niger and the Republic of Congo, and we are working on projects in Benin and Cameroon. Working with World Vision, UNICEF, and Plan International, the High Commission has identified schools in need, and uses the presentation ceremonies to rally community support and draw attention to the shortage of educational equipment in many African schools.

Potable water and sanitary facilities

Leper settlement in Orji River, Enugu state

In the last financial year, our DAP funds enabled Enugu-based co-operative Chimfunnanya (9th Mile) to provide a borehole to the Leper settlement in Orji River, Enugu state. This financial year, we further assisted the project by funding the construction of six toilets and bathrooms for the settlement.

Library and ICT Project

Orozo, Federal Capital Territory

On 13 November 2012, representatives of the Australian High Commission attended the inauguration of the DAP-funded library and ICT project in Orozo, FCT. Items donated include computers, Microsoft packages and other software, a 5kva stabilizer, ceiling fans, a small generator, computer tables, partitioned library desks and chairs, library shelves, as well as literature and story books.
Prime Minister’s Special Envoy William Fisher
visiting Niger, Benin, Cameroon and the Republic of Congo

The Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for the Francophonie, Mr William Fisher, was a
tireless traveller to this region in 2012, and it has been a privilege for the High
Commission to participate in all of his program of high-level visits to our francophone
countries of accreditation.

With recent visits to the Republics of Benin, Congo, Cameroon and Niger, the
Special Envoy forged strong bonds with his interlocutors and has left a lasting legacy of
substantive engagement with the region.

Australia has been elected to serve as a non-permanent
member on the United Nations Security Council for
2013 and 2014. For the next two years, Australia will
have a direct hand in shaping solutions to the world’s
most pressing security challenges.

Australia greatly appreciates the strong support of our
African and global partners in the October election and
the confidence they have shown in Australia.

Australia will play a constructive role across the breadth
of the Council’s peace and security agenda. Apart from
Africa, other key priorities will include Afghanistan, Syria,
Iran and North Korea. Australia will also work to ensure
the effectiveness of various sanctions regimes, including
those targeting individuals associated with Al-Qaida.

“It’s countries saying ‘we like Australia. We think Australia’s
role is good and positive and we want to see Australia
provide leadership’.” - Foreign Minister Bob Carr
Departing High Commissioner’s farewell visits

The former High Commissioner Mr Ian McConville undertook a “bitter sweet” farewell tour of his countries of non-resident accreditation in the final few months of 2012. While he (and his family) have a heavy heart at having to say farewell, it was also an opportunity to reflect on the significant advances that have been achieved in the bilateral relationships with all the countries in the region. He and the family look forward to an opportunity to savour the joys of West and Central Africa at a different pace in the future…perhaps even as tourists! But that’s another story!

ASOHOM
Association of Spouses of Heads of Mission

In December 2012, Ms Libby McCutchan completed a challenging but very rewarding two-year term as Chair of the Association of Spouses of Heads of Mission (ASOHOM). Over 40 embassies are members of this group. Apart from ASOHOM’s significant fundraising role through the annual International Charity Bazaar, ASOHOM has supported over 15 community aid projects in the last two years, focusing on women and children in need in Nigeria. ASOHOM has conducted a range of high level calls to discuss ways of promoting local charities, including on the First Lady, Dame Patience Jonathan, and the spouse of the Minister for the Federal Capital Territory.

At the Bazaar this year, Team Australia’s fund raising through meat pies, sausage sandwiches and busking garnered nearly $600 towards an overall ASOHOM total of $33,750. The Minister for Women’s Affairs and Social Development was the Guest of Honour at the Bazaar.

Senior officials visit Abuja

21-22 November 2012

Assistant Secretary of DFAT’s Africa Branch, Dave Sharma, conducted a successful two day visit to Abuja. Apart from high level calls on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other highlights included discussions with National Security Adviser Alhaji Sambo Dasuki and key ECOWAS officials. Also in the delegation was Ashton Robinson, Assistant Director General, Office of National Assessments.

Photo on the right: Mr Sharma cutting the welcome cake at the Australian High Commission.

Mrs Libby McCutchan, Vice Chair Mrs Odette Toure, Mrs Rosemary Hua (First Step Action for Children Initiative) and Mrs Verena Hodel (spouse of Swiss Ambassador) during the commissioning of a borehole in Tyomu village, Benue State.
Bilateral relations
Australia signs MoUs with Nigeria, Benin and The Gambia

On 5 September 2012, the Permanent Secretaries of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU provides a framework for future cooperation, including regular consultations on bilateral and international issues of mutual interest.

Australia has also recently signed MoUs with the Government of The Gambia on 13 July 2012, and the Government of Benin on 17 August 2012.

Australia’s counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Guinea

The rise in the incidences of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has emerged as a pressing regional problem. These attacks threaten the security and economic prosperity of West and Central African nations, with flow-on effects for landlocked states.

Australia has considerable expertise in managing maritime issues and is committed to assisting African states and institutions to respond to this problem.

In July 2012, Australia hosted a Counter-Piracy Conference in Perth. The conference, which included participants from Benin and Nigeria, explored the lessons learned from addressing the problem of piracy in South-East Asia, and how these might be applied to piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Guinea. The conference was followed-up with a counter-piracy workshop in New York, co-hosted by the United Nations missions of Australia and Benin.

Australia is supporting the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the development of an integrated maritime strategy. The strategy will provide a comprehensive response to the threats facing the ECOWAS maritime domain, including piracy and armed robbery, drug trafficking and transnational crime, illegal fishing, and environmental degradation.

Australia also provided training to combat piracy during a four-week Ocean Governance and Maritime Security Course held in Wollongong during November 2012. The Course brought together 30 naval and maritime experts from across West Africa, including three from Benin, two from Cameroon, and four from Nigeria.
Australia appoints new Trade Commissioner for West Africa

In 2012, Austrade appointed Gordon Chakaodza as the inaugural Trade Commissioner for Accra, Ghana, as part of its broader expansion in the growth areas of West Africa. Mr Chakaodza has extensive commercial experience and was formerly Austrade’s National Manager, Mining and Resources. He will work with the Australian High Commissions in Abuja and Accra on developing Australia’s growing trade and investment ties with West Africa, and promoting Australian education and training.

Austrade is the Australian Government’s trade and investment development agency. Austrade can help companies around the world to source goods and services from Australia by:
⇒ Helping you identify and contact Australian suppliers;
⇒ Providing insight on Australian capabilities; and
⇒ Alerting you to the latest products and services out of Australia to help you grow your business.

Austrade also helps international companies establish and build their business in Australia. Austrade provide the expertise required to make good investment decisions, including:
⇒ Initial coordination of all investment enquiries and assistance;
⇒ Information on the Australian business and regulatory environment; and
⇒ Market intelligence and investment opportunities.

Trade related enquiries can be addressed to Austrade in Accra:
Ms Yvonne Ablorh-Quarcoo
Business Development Manager
Austrade Accra
c/o Australian High Commission
2 Second Rangoon Close
(Cnr Josef B. Tito Avenue)
Cantonments Accra
Ghana
Tel: +233 302 216 400/430
Fax: +233 302 777 080
Email: info@austrade.gov.au
yvonne.ablorh-quarcoo@austrade.gov.au
Web: http://www.austrade.gov.au

Foreign Minister Bob Carr announced on Human Rights Day that Australia will join the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights initiative. As a country with renowned expertise in responsible mining, Australia is proud to join the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, the Netherlands, Colombia and Switzerland in this initiative.

Senator Carr emphasised that Australian mining companies are expanding overseas and that the Voluntary Principles provide practical guidance to these mining, oil and gas companies on lowering risks and managing mine security in a way that respects the human rights and freedoms of local communities and prevents conflict.

Many Australian companies, such as BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto, already use the Voluntary Principles and the number is expected to grow as more companies realise the benefits.

The Voluntary Principles provide guidance to companies on:
⇒ conducting assessments of human rights risks associated with security;
⇒ screening/training public and private security forces in human rights issues;
⇒ ensuring that the use of force is proportional and lawful; and
⇒ developing systems for reporting and investigating allegations of human rights abuses.

For more information please visit www.voluntaryprinciples.org

Australia to join global human rights and mining initiative

Courtesy: Kogi Iron Limited
The tenth annual Africa Down Under (ADU) mining conference was held in Perth from 29 to 31 August. The conference, which included 180 exhibition booths and more than 80 presentations, attracted around 2500 delegates including 18 mining ministers. Among them were Mr Régis Immongault (Gabon), Arc. Musa Mohammed Sada (Nigeria), Mr Omar H. Tchiana (Niger) and Mr Pierre Oba (Republic of Congo).

The conference provided a valuable opportunity for members of industry, government, finance, and the media from Australia and Africa to discuss the burgeoning resources relations between the two continents. There are over 200 Australian companies involved in 650 projects in 37 countries across Africa, with A$50 billion in current and prospective investment.
Mining study tours

The Australian Government continues to provide training, study tours, short-term advisory support and funding for capacity building programs, particularly in the areas of mining governance, agriculture and food security and public policy reform, to African governments through the Australia-Africa Partnerships Facility (AAPF).

The mining sector is a significant contributor to economic growth with considerable potential to help reduce poverty and accelerate human development. Australia is sharing its expertise in mining by funding a large number of mining related study tours, with 30 participants from Nigeria, Niger, Gabon and Cameroon in 2012. Below are impressions of some of the mining study tours that took place in the last few months.

Women in Mining
26 October - 9 November 2012, South Africa & Australia

Uranium study tour
12-18 August 2012, Australia

Alumni Forum
12-16 November 2012, Mozambique
Training opportunities in Australia

Every year, Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) invites a number of international junior diplomats to participate in the department’s graduate program.

From 6 August to 5 October 2012, 51 DFAT Graduate Trainees and one New Zealand Exchange Officer were joined by 26 international participants from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America and for a training program known as ‘International Participation in Graduate Training’ (IPGT). Among them were Ms Jennifer Zidon Mshelia and Mr Victor Nwaoba Itumo from Nigeria, as well as Gabonese official Mr Ludwig Ipouta-Oroumbongany.

The IPGT aims to develop the professional skills and knowledge of junior diplomats as well as build strong and enduring personal and professional links between participants.

The program includes a range of academic short courses, professional skills training and case study exercises relevant to the work of junior diplomats. In addition to the training provided in Canberra, participants are also given the opportunity to travel to regional areas of Australia to better their understanding of contemporary foreign and trade policy issues affecting Australia.

“The IPGT training was a life rewarding experience for me” - Jennifer Mshelia

“The IPGT program is unique and provides an unparalleled avenue for professional diplomatic, academic, social and cultural integration at an international level, which holds multiple benefits for the host country and participants not only for the present, but also for the future” - Victor Itumo

From 15 to 17 October 2012, the Australian Office of Trade Negotiations offered a Trade Policy Course bringing together both Australian and international participants from government and industry. The objectives of the course were to introduce the basic instruments of trade policy; introduce the global trading environment in which Australia’s trade policy and negotiations operate; and equip participants with practical skills to help them operate effectively on trade policy issues overseas or in their agency headquarters.

International participants were also invited to attend an additional two-day program involving development-focused discussions and engagement with relevant counterparts from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

“An insightful course on the nitty-gritty of trade policy, with practical exposure to negotiations and its vagaries. Quite a memorable experience, bringing to bear the cultural idiosyncrasy of participants in practical negotiations” - Ubelejit R. Ikuru

Among this year’s international participants were Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials Mr Adamou Amadou (Niger, pictured left); Mr Adjignon A. Ame-Agboviar (Benin, below); and Mr Ubelejit Renner Ikuru (Nigeria, below).
As part of its commitment to increase its engagement with African nations, the Australian Government has increased its development assistance program across the region almost four-fold since 2009. A major component of this program is an ambitious, pan-African program of development scholarships and fellowships: Australia Awards in Africa (AAA).

Over the past three years, the number of scholarships available for African professionals has increased ten-fold to a total of 1,000 development awards annually. One quarter of all Australian development scholarships are now directed to Africa.

Australia Awards comprises four categories of scholarships:

1. Short Course Awards (SCA): Targeted professional development opportunities in a specialised field. The SCA range in duration from one to three months. Training is delivered in Australia as well as in Africa.

2. Australian Development Scholarships Long-Term Awards (LTA): Postgraduate scholarships leading to an academic qualification from an Australian university, usually at Master level. Twenty PhD Awards are also available each year in Agriculture.

3. Australian Leadership Award Scholarships (ALAS): Competitive supplementary award for high-achieving LTA recipients aiming at addressing priority development areas by enhancing leadership capacity.

4. Australian Leadership Award Fellowships (ALAF): These support Africans to study or carry out specific research with an Australian institution that will directly benefit their work back home.

For more details on eligibility criteria and how to apply please refer to www.adsafrica.com.au

AAA pre-departure briefing 2012 for LTA awardees from Nigeria, Cameroon and The Gambia

For 2013, a total of 52 scholars from Nigeria (31), Cameroon (12) and The Gambia (9) have been awarded post graduate scholarships under the AAA program. Two Nigerian Master-level awardees were also selected for an Australian Leadership Awards Scholarship.

From 18 to 19 October 2012, the Australian Government hosted the scholarship awardees at a pre-departure briefing in Abuja. The workshop provided essential information, including how to successfully relocate as well as advice about living and studying in Australia, and their obligation to return to their home country for a minimum period of two years after completing the scholarship. Moreover, they had a chance to meet AAA alumni who shared their valuable experiences at a farewell function at the official residence in Abuja.
Touring art exhibition
Message Stick - Indigenous Identity in Urban Australia

From 10 to 21 August 2012, the Australian High Commission hosted the touring Indigenous Australian art exhibition 'Message Stick: Indigenous Identity in Urban Australia' in Abuja.

The exhibition was held in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art, was generously hosted by the Transcorp Hilton Hotel and sponsored by the Australian-Nigerian firms DeltaAfrik Engineering Ltd/Worley Parsons as well as KCM Mining Ltd.

The official opening on 10 August was well-attended with about 200 guests. Remarks were given by then High Commissioner Ian McConville and Mr George Ufot, Director of Culture, representing the Minister of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation. A didgeridoo performance by London-based trumpet/didgeridoo player Mr Chris Williams, and a performance of traditional Nigerian dancing and drumming by the dance troupe of the Nike Centre for Art and Culture complemented the event.

Message Stick formed the centrepiece of a broader program of cultural diplomacy linking the Indigenous Australian and Nigerian cultures. Part of this was a half day children’s art and music workshop including didgeridoo music, Nigerian dance, dot paintings and tie-dye, which was attended by more than 70 children from local and international schools in Abuja.

Photography workshop

These images were the product of a three-day photography workshop funded by the Australian High Commission and conducted by Australian filmmaker Jolyon Hoff in May 2012.

Depicting everyday life in Mpape, an Abuja satellite settlement, the photographs provided an excellent link to the theme of Urban Indigenous identity in Message Stick. The images were also a timely reflection on changes in Nigeria’s urban environment, with Mpape slated for demolition to make way for a new housing development.

The ten workshop participants were presented with their certificates jointly by the High Commissioner, the Director of Culture, and the Director General of the National Gallery of Art during the opening reception (pictured below left).
For all Australian living or travelling abroad please remember to register with your Embassy or High Commission on the following link: http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/

As a multicultural and open country, Australia welcomes people from all places to either visit or make Australia their home for good. In either case, if you are not an Australian citizen, you must remember to obtain a visa before you travel.

**Visa information**

Visa application process for Nigerian citizens:

1) Visit the website of the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to find the appropriate visa ([www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)).
3) Submit your complete visa application attaching all required documents to the VFS centre in Lagos or Abuja.
4) The visa processing takes an average of 20 working days – make sure you lodge your application early enough.

Note: You can track your application by entering your receipt number and your last name on the VFS website!

Visa applications from Nigeria, Benin and The Gambia are being processed by the Australian High Commission in Pretoria, South Africa (for more information on application process: [www.southafrica.highcommission.gov.au](http://www.southafrica.highcommission.gov.au))

Visa applications from Cameroon, Gabon, Niger and the Republic of Congo are being processed by the Australian High Commission in Nairobi, Kenya (for more information on application process: [www.kenya.highcommission.gov.au](http://www.kenya.highcommission.gov.au))

**Consular information**

An important function of the Australian High Commission is to protect the interests of Australians overseas and to assist in ensuring their welfare. As such, we are committed to providing effective, prompt and courteous consular services, delivered in an equitable way, to all Australians requiring them. In order to assist Australians abroad, it is important that you register with us so that we can contact you in an emergency.

On the Smartraveller website, Australians can also find information about travelling overseas and on the consular services the High Commission can provide. Importantly, there is also a link to the travel advisories for Nigeria and the other countries for which we are responsible. These advisories are updated regularly, so we suggest that those interested in receiving updates subscribe by registering their travels on the Smartraveller website.

Also note that all Australians travelling abroad can enter the “Travel Tales” competition (on the Smartraveller website) to win a share of $6000 in travel vouchers for overseas adventures.

Finally, if consular assistance is required, we recommend you contact the dedicated 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre hotline on +61 2 6261 3305.
The Australian team at Message Stick

Back row (L to R): Hamish McConville, Third Secretary Chris Watkins, Senior Admin Officer and Deputy Head of Mission Neil Sanderson, Third Secretary Tom Beamish, didgeridoo performer Chris Williams, PA to the High Commissioner Jane Heatherington with Lucille Okeji, Accountant Femi Esan, Property Manager Hakeem Lawal with daughter Mariam, Honorary Consul Alan Davies, Accountant Patricia Okeji with daughter Bernice

Front row (L to R): Head of Mission Driver David Davou, Research Officer Mirella Mahlstein Ajibade, former High Commissioner Ian McConville and youngest son Kieren, Admin Officer Sandy Costagliola

Absent: Admin and Consular Officer Latonia Dabiri-Mpamugo, Drivers Emmanuel Affon and Alfred Okesokun