

The Australian High Commissioner to Zambia, His Excellency Matthew Neuhaus, presented his letter of accreditation to the Secretarygeneral, Mr Sindiso Ngwenya, on Wednesday, 17 October 2012.

At the presentation, Mr Neuhaus said that he was delighted to be Australia's first Special representative to COMESA. He noted that the occasion was another important step in Australia's growing engagement with the African continent.

"I acknowledge COMESA's role in economic integration which is important for driving economic growth and development in the region," he said.

The Secretary-General, Mr Sindiso Ngwenya, welcomed Mr Neuhaus to COMESA and highlighted the continuous, fruitful co-operation between Australia and Africa.

He said that Australia's trade with Africa has grown steadily over the last decade at an annual average rate of 6.1 percent, and Australia's total merchandise trade with Africa was valued at \$5.8 billion in 2009-2010.

"Australia has significant and growing interests in Africa's resource sector with Australian companies having an estimated current and prospective investment of more than US \$20 billion in the region. As of January 2011, more than 200 Australian resource companies had nearly 600 projects spread across 42 African countries," Mr Ngwenya said.

"We are also aware that Australia provided US \$200.9 million in 2010-2011 in development assistance to the continent, an increase of 23 percent over the previous year," he added.

Mr Ngwenya also applauded the Australian Government's commitment to increasing its total Official Development Assistance to 0.5 percent of gross national income (GNI) by 2015–2016 and the GNI share going to least developed countries.

“I particularly commend the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Australia and Africa, in New York on 23 September 2010. The areas of cooperation comprise, among others: trade and investment, peace and security with humanitarian assistance, achievement of Millennium Development Goals, agriculture and food security, democracy, governance and human rights, and climate change. These programmes constitute the main concerns for COMESA and as a Regional Economic Community considered a major building block of the African Union, we expect to fully and efficiently exploit this Memorandum,” he concluded.

Mr Ngwenya congratulated the Australian High Commissioner upon his appointment and extended best wishes to him in the new responsibilities.

Australia supports COMESA’s Trading for Peace Programme, and the Alliance for Commodity Trade in eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA).