



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION ABUJA

Visit to Benin by Australian Prime Minister's Special Envoy H.E. Mr William Fisher, 16-17 August 2012

H.E. Mr William Fisher, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to La Francophonie and to the Francophone States of Africa, undertook a successful visit to Cotonou, Benin, on 16-17 August 2012. The visit included meetings with the President of the Republic of Benin, H.E. Dr Thomas Boni Yayi, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration, La Francophonie and Beninese Abroad, H.E. Mr Nassirou Bako-Arifari. The visit underlined the deepening of relations between Australia and Benin, and provided a valuable opportunity to discuss ways in which the two countries can cooperate more closely on issues of bilateral and international importance.

Mr Fisher updated President Yayi on the significant progress in areas of bilateral cooperation since his last visit to Benin in June 2011, including:

- Australia will provide training to five Beninese officials in ocean governance and maritime security, to assist Benin combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea;
- Benin has been offered eleven [Australia Awards](#) in 2012, which will provide training opportunities in the fields of diplomacy, education, agriculture, and policy; and
- Australia is providing support to address the challenges of food security and productivity, funding two agricultural research projects as well as technical assistance for Benin's cotton farmers.

Following the meeting between Mr Fisher and Foreign Minister Bako-Arifari, Their Excellencies signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Benin. 'This Memorandum of Understanding reflects the shared values of Australia and Benin and embodies the ongoing efforts to broaden cooperation between our countries', said Mr Fisher.

Mr Fisher was accompanied by the Australian Ambassador to Benin, H.E. Mr Ian McConville, Counsellor-Development (Pretoria), Mr Percy Stanley, and Third Secretary (Abuja), Mr Tom Beamish. During the visit, Ambassador McConville met with Benin's Chief of Navy Staff, Captain Denis Hounsou Gbessemehlan, to discuss counter-piracy cooperation and Captain Gbessemehlan's recent participation at the Perth Counter-Piracy Conference in July 2012.

About the Special Envoy

Mr William Fisher was appointed by the Australian Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, as Special Envoy to La Francophonie and to the Francophone States of Africa in October 2010. Mr Fisher, a career diplomat with the Department most recently served overseas as Australia's High Commissioner to Canada (2005-08). Prior to this, he served abroad as Ambassador to France (2000-04); Ambassador to Thailand (1997-2000); Ambassador to Israel (1990-93); Consul-General in Honolulu (1983-87); Chargé d'Affaires in Tehran (1982-83); Consul-General and Head of Post in Port Vila (1978-80) and in Noumea (1975-78), as well as earlier postings at the Embassy in Laos and at the Mission to the United Nations in Geneva. He is currently the State Director of the Victorian Office of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.