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CAPE TOWN – Executive mayor of Cape Town, Alderman Dan Plato, welcomed the first Slovenian diplomatic mission in sub-Saharan Africa as he officially opened the Honorary Consulate of Slovenia in South Africa in the presence of some 100 dignitaries and other guests in Durbanville on 4 February 2010.

Cape Town has much to offer as one of the world's greatest cities, said Alderman Plato in his address. "Creating and sustaining good relations with foreign countries is important to promote growth in Cape Town."

The establishment of the Honorary Consulate of Slovenia "offers possibilities and options", he said. The chance to cooperate on a large scale should not be missed, as investment from all sectors is needed to solve the housing crisis that Cape Town, as a preferred urban destination, is experiencing. "We hope both the private, public and foreign sector can work together to solve this and other challenges faced by the City."

"The opening of the Honorary Consulate signals the growing bilateral relations between the two countries and the importance of greater contact," said Honorary Consul of Slovenia, Dr Prieur du Plessis, in his address. "A two-way diplomatic channel between Slovenia and South Africa will broaden the relationship between the two countries and allow us to fully capitalise on business and other opportunities."

A letter from Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Samuel Žbogar was read to guests at the event. He wrote: "Slovenia attaches special importance to developing relations with South Africa, one of the key political and economical players in Africa and in the international arena."

To investigate business opportunities, Dr du Plessis, also a well-known South African businessman, headed up a 15-member-strong trade delegation to Slovenia in September 2009. A reciprocal trade delegation will visit South Africa in October this year.

According to Dr du Plessis, several other projects are in the pipeline between the two countries. These include a large-scale tourism initiative, which aims to greatly increase the number of visitors in both directions. In addition, South Africa will also be a special guest at the 2010 Ljubljana World Book Capital project.

In the field of science, joint microbiology projects have been launched between the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch and the University of Maribor in Slovenia. Through another initiative, 20 Slovenian students will be visiting South Africa to build additional school facilities at the Ithuba Skills College near Johannesburg.

An international photographic competition for children, organised by *National Geographic Junior/Kids*, will see the South African winner visiting Slovenia in April, and the Slovenian winner coming to this country later this month. Currently discussions are being held on the exchange of musicians who will provide tuition in the visiting cities.

To promote skills transfer, the University of Ljubljana has made two bursaries available to South African students for study in Slovenia in the field of tourism. Furthermore, the IEDC-Bled School of Management has made €30 000 available to a South African student pursuing postgraduate management studies.

After the event, Durbanville's Member of Parliament, Denise Robinson, said "gateways" such as the Slovenian Honorary Consulate are important to be able to reach out to countries further afield. She said the proposed educational and cultural exchanges create an opportunity for South Africans, especially those in the Durbanville community where the consulate is based, to build bridges.

"Slovenia and South Africa have much in common," said Dr du Plessis. Both countries were isolated for many years. They have open economies and a high level of professional services. The citizens are proficient in English and are also great lovers of sport – the Slovenian soccer team has qualified to compete in the FIFA World Cup later this year.

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About Slovenia

Formerly part of Yugoslavia, Slovenia has been a democratic parliamentary republic since 1991. It was the first of the 'new entrants' to join the European Union (2004) as well as the European Monetary Union (2007). The so-called "jewel of Central Europe" is a compact country, about half the size of Switzerland,

and is bordered by Austria, Italy, Hungary and Croatia. It is 20 273 km² in size and has a population of just over two million.

Slovenia has been dubbed many things, including 'Europe in miniature', 'the sunny side of the Alps', 'the green piece of Europe' and 'Central Europe's best-kept secret'. Although it is a small country, it is very diverse, with areas of outstanding natural beauty ranging from rugged Alpine mountains to tranquil lakes, fairytale forests, valleys with lush vineyards and even a stretch of beautiful coastline on the Adriatic.

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