



Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

Inquiry: Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry into issues facing diaspora communities in Australia.

The Government's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper highlighted the valuable role that diaspora communities in Australia can play in deepening ties with other countries and expanding Australia's political, trade and business networks. They do this by helping to build cultural understanding, facilitating trade and investment, promoting our attractiveness as a destination of choice for skilled migrants, and influencing how Australia is perceived internationally. Diaspora communities can also support Australia's development assistance program by helping to improve our knowledge and understanding of development and humanitarian issues in other countries.

This submission focuses on two of the inquiry's Terms of Reference that are relevant to DFAT's work: support offered to diaspora community associations and similar organisations (a), and opportunities to strengthen communication and partnerships between government and diaspora communities in Australia (d). Specifically, it addresses these two issues by reference to the Department's role in supporting a number of Foundations, Councils and Institutes (FCIs).

The seven FCIs managed by DFAT cover a range of bilateral and regional relationships spanning Southeast and North Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.ⁱ The FCIs engage relevant diaspora national bodies, community groups and individuals in pursuing their objectives and administer grants which are open to diaspora groups. In addition to the DFAT-managed FCIs and the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations, this submission also touches on the work of the Advisory Group on Australia-Africa Relations (AGAAR), which was established in 2015 with support from DFAT, and aspects of diaspora engagement by the DFAT Office of the Pacific.

Support offered to diaspora community associations and similar organisations, including government grants and other funding

DFAT manages annual funding of around \$5.5 million through the International Relations Grant Program allocated across seven FCIs. This funding is for activities that support the Government's foreign policy and economic diplomacy interests, project a positive image of Australia and strengthen people-to-people links, in which diaspora communities are important stakeholders.

FCIs have provided regular funding for diaspora cultural events such as the Indonesian Film Festival, supported by the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII), and the Latin Film Festival, supported by the Council of Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR). Support is also provided for peak meetings and galas, which are important events in community calendars. Examples include the biennial conference of the National Federation of Australia-Japan Societies, supported by the Australia-Japan Foundation (AJF), and the Annual Business Excellence Awards, presented by the Australia-Latin America Business Council with support from COALAR. In 2021, the Australia-Korea Foundation (AKF) will facilitate and support commemorations for the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and the Republic of Korea, including work with the Korean diaspora to highlight and deepen existing people-to-people links.ⁱⁱ

Through a competitive grants process, FCIs have also funded projects based in diaspora communities. In 2019, the Council for Australia-Arab Relations (CAAR) supported the Islamic Society of South Australia to hold the Al Salam Festival in Adelaide. The AJF has funded a homestay program run by the ACT's Australia Japan Society for youth from tsunami-affected Tohoku. The Australia-ASEAN Council (AAC) provides regular support for the ASEAN Australia Games, a sporting event promoting camaraderie and understanding between members of Southeast Asian diasporas in Australia.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ongoing programs run by individual FCIs include the AII's Muslim Exchange Program which supports young Muslim community leaders from Indonesia to engage with Australian civil society groups, including the Indonesian diaspora.

Opportunities to strengthen communication and partnerships between government and diaspora communities in Australia

The FCIs provide ongoing opportunities to strengthen communication between DFAT and diaspora communities. The membership of the majority of FCI boards includes prominent members of the relevant diaspora community, bringing important perspectives to the boards and, through *ex officio* membership of the boards, to DFAT. Conversely, members of the FCIs Boards engage with diaspora communities as part of their representative roles.

The AAC supports an annual program for the ASEAN Heads of Mission based in Canberra to engage with the Australian community, including diaspora groups. The 2020 business plans of the AAC and the AII include a dedicated focus on expanding engagement with diaspora communities by commissioning research on the social and economic contribution of Southeast Asian diaspora to Australian society and its engagement with the region.

The Australia-India Council (AIC) works to elevate the profile of Australians of Indian origin and their achievements across the spectrum of Australian society, with strategies including social media outreach through the 'Australia & India – A Dynamic Mix' campaign. DFAT and the AIC have engaged members of the Indian diaspora through the Australia-India Business Council and the Australia-India Chamber of Commerce.^{iv}

AGAAR identified African diaspora communities in its 2016 *'Strategy for Australia's Engagement with Africa'*. The idea for an Australia-Africa Week of activities involving universities, business groups and diaspora communities originated from AGAAR. Australia-Africa Week takes place each year in Perth around the Africa Down Under (ADU) Mining Conference.

National Foundation for Australia-China Relations

DFAT is establishing the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations, a unique national platform dedicated to strengthening engagement between Australia and China. The Advisory Board of the Foundation includes strong representation from the Chinese Australian diaspora. Part of the Foundation's mandate is to engage across government at all levels, industry, academia, think tanks and community sectors, including working with diverse Chinese Australian communities. Through grants and program activities, it will enhance the ability of key stakeholders to engage confidently with China and help support social cohesion in Australia. The National Foundation for Australia-China Relations is expected to be formally launched later this year.

Engagement with Pacific diaspora

DFAT has valued the input of members of the Pacific diaspora community to consultations that informed Australia's new development strategy, *Partnerships for Recovery*, and to the design and implementation of a number of Pacific Step-Up projects.

A new social media initiative, *Stay Strong Pacific*, under the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) sees high profile members of the Pacific community involved in videos which help build resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under another program, *PacificAus Sports*, the Office of the Pacific supported a special ticket deal for Samoan diaspora to attend a rugby test match between Australia and Samoa in 2019. Future activities under this program will seek to ensure Pacific diaspora communities are engaged with all Australian-based activities.

ⁱ The seven FCIs are the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII), the Australia-ASEAN Council (AAC), the Australia-Japan Foundation (AJF), the Australia-Korea Foundation (AKF), the Australia-India Council (AIC), the Council for Australia-Arab Relations (CAAR) and the Council of Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR). The Australia-China Council, established in 1978, has been decommissioned.

ⁱⁱ The majority of grants referred to in this paragraph are provided through a competitive annual process.

ⁱⁱⁱ At the time of writing, 2020-21 grant rounds had either shifted to digital options or been postponed, as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

^{iv} The India Economic Strategy, commissioned by the Government, identified the latent potential of the Indian diaspora in helping build the economic partnership with India.