

# Chapter 7

## People-to-people links and relationship building as part of Australia's public diplomacy

7.1 Whether it is based on international conferences or seminars; on reviews of existing public diplomacy programs; or on the experiences of practitioners or students of public diplomacy, the literature on public diplomacy emphasises the importance of dialogue as a critical element of good public diplomacy. Thus, public diplomacy is not only about projecting an image; it is about engagement and relationship building.<sup>1</sup> This chapter considers how effectively Australia's public diplomacy programs build and sustain Australia's network of relationships with other countries.

### Public diplomacy—a two-way street

7.2 Overseas studies on public diplomacy recognise that public diplomacy cannot be one-dimensional; that it must be more than projecting an image or delivering a message. They stress that public diplomacy is about engagement and building relationships that ensure that links and communications systems between countries continue to function despite tensions or breakdowns in formal diplomacy. Rainer Schlageter noted:

In order to be successful, today's public diplomacy has to go beyond traditional 'one-way-street' information work: It should be a *dialogue* and a steady discussion with the goal to establish a *long-term relationship* with foreign audiences and in particular with the leadership from all fields of society.<sup>2</sup>

### Previous inquiries—the importance of people-to-people links

7.3 Recent inquiries by parliamentary committees and academic research on Australia's relations with specific countries provide valuable insight into the network of relationships that underpin formal diplomacy. The JSCFADT and the Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade References Committee have conducted a number of inquiries into Australia's relations with countries including Japan, China, Indonesia and Malaysia. All reports have emphasised the importance of building people-to-people links as a means of sustaining a healthy, strong and mutually beneficial relationship. For example, in its report on Australia's relations with China, the Senate

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1 Javier Noya, 'The United States and Europe: Convergence or Divergence in Public Diplomacy?', The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 13 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

2 Rainer Schlageter, 'German Public Diplomacy', The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 22 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007). See also Mark Leonard with Catherine Stead and Conrad Smewing, *Public Diplomacy*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, 2002, pp. 9–10.

committee recognised the benefits that derive from building a lasting network of friendships with another country. It found:

...any relationship between two nations cannot be viewed purely in economic terms. The bilateral relationship comprises a complex web of interrelationships between a diverse range of actors. Contributors to the ongoing evolution of the relationship include individuals, community organisations, educational institutions, sporting associations, scientific and technological research agencies and bodies, NGOs, sub-national governments, and federal, state and local government departments, to name but a few.<sup>3</sup>

7.4 The committee believed that the possibilities for deepening Australia's relationship with China were enormous. It acknowledged that the challenge was to identify and recognise the vital role that various stakeholders play in contributing to the strength and vitality of the bilateral relationship, and to support them in their activities.

7.5 The JSCFADT provided another example of the vital role of people-to-people links in its report on Australia's relations with Indonesia. It concluded:

One of the strongest themes that appeared in the evidence received during the course of this inquiry was the importance of the people-to-people links in building Australia's relationship with Indonesia. It was a theme stressed by the myriad government agencies that made submissions to this inquiry, by teachers and academics and by individuals.<sup>4</sup>

7.6 These observations apply with equal force to other countries and clearly show that people-to-people links are the lynch pin of Australia's public diplomacy. Indeed, the committee's inquiry into public diplomacy further underlined the critical importance of these associations.

7.7 In this regard, RMIT recognised that while public diplomacy is about transmitting values and ideas 'by influencing the way individuals think and feel, it cannot be done "remotely"'. It argued that public diplomacy 'requires person-to-person interaction through a variety of media and fora to support not only the messages Government wishes to convey but the dialogue which must surround them'.<sup>5</sup> Mr Chris Freeman, a public affairs practitioner with extensive experience in Australia's public policy programs over the last 30 years or so, also noted:

On the broader question of the selling of our views, our philosophies, our governance and the way we approach things in Australia, I agree that the key really is having people-to-people links and bringing people out to have

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3 Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *Opportunities and challenges: Australia's relationship with China*, November 2005, pp. 347–8.

4 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade, Foreign Affairs Sub Committee, *Near Neighbours—Good Neighbours*, May 2004, paragraphs 6.1–6.4.

5 *Submission 9*, p. [1].

a look for themselves or sending people over there to talk to people. It is not something that can be sold by putting out publications and hammering away at people.<sup>6</sup>

7.8 Reinforcing this view, Geoff Miller said that public diplomacy was about 'cultivating good relations against the day you need them'.<sup>7</sup>

7.9 The following section looks at some of the main public diplomacy programs designed to forge people-to-people links. These include exchange and visitor programs.

### **Education and exchange programs**

7.10 Previous parliamentary committees have noted the importance of in-country training for building personal networks and as a means of improving mutual understanding between countries.<sup>8</sup> They urged the government to support programs that encourage Australian students or professionals to study or train in other countries, particularly in Asia, and for overseas students to study in Australia. For example, with regard to Indonesia, the JSCFADT noted:

It is extremely important that Australian students are given the opportunity and encouragement to study in Indonesia. Australian students who do so ultimately enrich not only their own but Australia's expertise and understanding of Indonesia and the Indonesian language. As young ambassadors for Australia, they also send a strong signal of our interest in Indonesia, and through their interactions, present opportunities for Indonesians to increase their understanding about Australia and Australians.<sup>9</sup>

7.11 The committee has selected the Youth Ambassador program and the Endeavour scholarships among the many similar types of activities for more detailed discussion.

#### *The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program*

7.12 The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program (AYAD) was established in 1998 to strengthen mutual understanding between Australia and the

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6 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 32.

7 *Submission 16*, reproduced from *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2002, p. 204.

8 In its report on Australia's relations with China, the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee recognised that student exchange programs have a vital role in promoting greater understanding and affinity between Australia and other countries, *Opportunities and challenges: Australia's relationship with China*, November 2005, pp. 288–290.

9 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade, Foreign Affairs Sub Committee, *Near Neighbours—Good Neighbours*, May 2004, Canberra, paragraph 6.85, p. 162.

countries of the Asia Pacific. It is an AusAID-led program that sends around 400 young Australians per year to developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The program places skilled young Australians, aged 18-30, on short-term assignments of between 3-12 months, in developing countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region. They work with Australian organisations and their overseas counterparts in a broad range of areas that include health, environment, rural development, gender, governance, justice, education and infrastructure development.

7.13 The purpose of the program is to strengthen mutual understanding and for the Youth Ambassadors to make a positive contribution to the development of their 'host' country. It is designed to allow young people to gain 'an increased understanding of the development needs of our neighbouring countries and broaden their experience by living and working in a cross-cultural environment'.<sup>10</sup>

7.14 According to Mr Alan March, Assistant Director General, AusAID, there have been 2,000 Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development to date, and the number is expected to rise to 2,500 by 2008.<sup>11</sup>

7.15 The scheme provides media training for possible promotional opportunities while the youth ambassadors are overseas. Upon return, they are encouraged to share their story with the media and community in general. Mr March acknowledged, however, that AusAID does not yet have a systematic approach to capture the experiences and maximise the benefits of the program.<sup>12</sup>

#### *The Australian Leadership Awards Program*

7.16 The Australian Leadership Awards Program offers scholarships and fellowships to academically gifted scholars from the Asia-Pacific region. The fellowship program provides short term study, research and professional attachment programs in Australia delivered by Australian organisations that provide these study, research and professional development activities in Australia. Fellows are 'leaders or mid-career professionals from the Asia-Pacific region who have the potential to assume leadership roles that can influence social and economic policy reform and development outcomes, both in their own countries and in the region'.<sup>13</sup>

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10 Australian Government, AusAID website, Youth Ambassadors, <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/youtham/whatis.cfm> (accessed 25 May 2007)

11 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 63.

12 See comments Mr Alan March, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 71.

13 ALA Scholarships are academically prestigious awards offered to high achievers from the Asia-Pacific region each year to undertake postgraduate study (Masters or Doctorate) and a Leadership Training Program in Australia. They are intended for those who are already leaders or have the potential to assume leadership roles that can influence social and economic policy reform and development outcomes, both in their own countries and in the Asia-Pacific region. AusAID website <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar/alafellow.cfm> (accessed 1 May 2007).

7.17 During their stay in Australia, these students have the opportunity to acquire a greater understanding of life in Australia and the way Australians think and behave. Usually, they become favourably disposed toward Australians and form close associations with teachers, mentors and fellow students. For example, Ms Fiona Buffington, Australian Education International, DEST, observed that many of the international students that have studied in Australia have returned to their homes 'with a perspective of Australia that has been very positive for our diplomacy and they have probably been some of our greatest advocates and ambassadors'.<sup>14</sup> She said:

We are aware that there are some very well regarded people who are now well placed in senior appointments in the region who had the opportunity for an education courtesy of the Colombo Plan, so that era through to the mid-eighties was a very positive one for Australia.<sup>15</sup>

7.18 As a result of all the programs designed to bring foreign students to Australian shores, including the Australian Leadership Awards Program, DEST indicated that:

There are now many businesses, political and cultural leaders in the Asia-Pacific region counted among the alumni of Australian universities and colleges. Many of these leaders came to Australia under the highly successful Colombo Plan of the 1950s. A new generation of scholars are now building on this tradition with some 318,000 international students studying in Australia in 2006, drawn not just from the Asia-Pacific region but from over 200 countries around the globe.

These students are gaining a first-hand experience of Australian people, institutions and our way of life. The experiences gained and friendships formed provide the basis for the goodwill in the personal, business and political relationships of the future.<sup>16</sup>

7.19 The sheer number of 318,000 international students studying in Australia in 2006 alone is impressive.<sup>17</sup> The network of current and former students provides an enormous pool of people, many of whom have taken up professional positions in their own country and can and do assist in promoting Australia's reputation.

### ***Support for education programs***

7.20 The committee found overwhelming support for programs designed to attract foreign students to Australian educational institutions and for Australian students to study overseas. Some submitters called for the numbers of students involved in the overseas study programs to be increased. Dr Broinowski stressed the importance of more Australians spending 'more time in our region—if necessary, with the support of

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14 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 53.

15 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 54.

16 *Submission 28*, p. 2.

17 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 54.

a public diplomacy program—going, learning and coming back'.<sup>18</sup> Mr Freeman suggested that Australia might boost the numbers of people coming to Australia and send more Australians to the region.<sup>19</sup> RMIT recommended that in the short term, the opportunities for 'Australian students to study abroad and for international students to study in Australia should be increased, and with it financial support for them to take up these opportunities'. It suggested that:

This need not simply be a matter of more funded scholarships, although they would be welcome: such a strategy might also involve tax incentives for individuals or employers sponsoring staff studying overseas or international students studying in Australia; remission of HECS debt for existing Australians studying overseas, and government to government arrangements regarding student exchange and scholarship programs.<sup>20</sup>

7.21 The committee notes the immediate benefits to public diplomacy of Australians studying and working overseas and of foreign students and professionals doing the same in Australia. The committee was also interested in how Australia consolidates and builds on the relationships that develop while students are studying in the country. In the following section it considers measures taken to maintain contact with overseas students.

### *Opportunities to build on education programs*

7.22 While acknowledging the value of programs such as the Youth Ambassador program and the Endeavour scholarships, some witnesses suggested that opportunities were being missed to capitalise on the benefits already deriving from the programs. Indeed, responding to a question about whether the Australian Leadership Awards Program could contribute more to Australia's public diplomacy, Mr March indicated that more could be done:

[T]he case was put to us that for a small amount of money and a small amount of effort a lot more could be made by harnessing that experience and harnessing that network and working with it. We have got that message and we are looking at how we can take it forward.<sup>21</sup>

7.23 Most of the suggestions concerned with Australia's education programs and lost opportunities related to alumni.

### **Alumni**

7.24 Previous parliamentary inquiries have given much attention to alumni associations as a means of developing and strengthening relationships with overseas

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18 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 35.

19 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 38.

20 *Submission 9*, p. [3].

21 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 70.

students who have studied in Australia.<sup>22</sup> In its report on Australia's relations with China, the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee presented evidence suggesting that developing alumni programs 'is one of the most effective ways of strengthening linkages' with another country. Evidence indicated that more could be done in this area. For example, the Australia–China Council informed the committee that 'with greater funding it could take a more proactive role in developing alumni associations for Chinese students that had studied in Australia'.<sup>23</sup> At that time, the committee noted the active alumni program run through the British Council, 'whereby UK alumni are invited to sporting, cultural, educational and networking events aimed at promoting the UK'.

7.25 In its report on Australia's relations with Indonesia, the JSCFADT also referred to evidence supporting the development and maintenance of strong alumni ties. One witness before that committee, Professor Hal Hill, ANU, made reference to the role that strong alumni networks can play in promoting Australian education. He suggested that there was scope for the Australian Embassy in Jakarta to do more in this regard. The view was supported by his colleague, Dr Chris Manning, ANU, who noted that by the time students had reached important positions in Indonesia, their association with Australia has dissipated significantly. To avoid the weakening of ties, he proposed that Australia draw from the Japanese experience and provide government support for the alumni relationships.<sup>24</sup>

7.26 Evidence to this committee adds weight to these findings about the importance of continuing engagement with alumni. DFAT recognised the contribution that alumni could make to Australia's public diplomacy. It stated that the department regards alumni as 'another natural partner in our efforts to promote Australia's standing as a diverse, tolerant and open society'. According to DFAT, overseas posts actively foster links with these organisations.<sup>25</sup>

7.27 A number of witnesses agreed with evidence presented to previous committees in that there is scope to strengthen alumni associations. Mr Mirchandani was of the view that ongoing relations with overseas students who had graduated from Australian universities could be followed up more strongly than they are:

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22 Senate Foreign Affairs and Trade References Committee, *Opportunities and challenges: Australia's relationship with China*, November 2005, pp. 287–90.

23 Senate Foreign Affairs and Trade References Committee, *Opportunities and challenges: Australia's relationship with China*, November 2005, p. 289.

24 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, Foreign Affairs Sub Committee, *Near Neighbours—Good Neighbours*, May 2004, paragraphs 4.174–4.175. Professor Hal Christopher Hill was Deputy Convenor and H.W. Arndt Professor of Pacific and Asian Studies, Indonesia Project, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. Dr Chris Manning, was Head, Indonesia Project, Economics Division, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.

25 *Submission 18*, p. 52.

Students come to Australia; they certainly regard Australia very well; they develop good contacts with the institutions; and they could form the great basis of an alumni association, if you like—a global alumni association, which could work on Australia's behalf.

My personal belief...is that this has not been followed through, shall we say, by the relevant department in a strategic way as to how you nurture these relationships, how you keep them as long-term relationships, how you follow the careers of those who are marked as successes back in their own countries and maintain the contact so that they become key influences on Australia's behalf.<sup>26</sup>

7.28 Dr Julie Wells, Director, Policy and Planning, RMIT University, gave the following example:

We run a number of promotional events with our alumni offshore. For example, we recently ran one in Singapore, which was a careers expo run in partnership with the City of Melbourne. When we approach DFAT for support or engagement, we get enthusiastic cooperation, but it is not systematic and it is not strategic; it is ad hoc.<sup>27</sup>

We will get approaches from DFAT. For example, we recently received a request from a DFAT official to visit us and talk about our alumni in Mauritius. But we are operating in a context-free zone, and I think we could make much more of this if the focus around public diplomacy could be shifted to accommodate an industry engagement framework that involves universities.<sup>28</sup>

7.29 Ms Fiona Buffington acknowledged that the department had found it hard to keep track of the many who had participated in the Colombo Plan between 1950 and 1985 because it pre-dated the era of computer databases.<sup>29</sup> She informed the committee that they had reviewed and evaluated the lack of engagement with students from the Colombo Plan.

7.30 Turning to the Endeavour scholarships and the Australia scholarship scheme, she advised the committee that from the beginning, 'we have been setting up a database so that will be able to track and stay in touch with the students, hopefully for their lifetime'.<sup>30</sup> She explained the potential to use this data base to keep in touch with former students which would enable the posts to engage them in future activities:

...coordinated within the regions themselves so that when people see a parliamentary committee coming through or a treasurer coming through at post and they are scanning to see some useful engagements for a treasurer

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26 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 44.

27 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 22.

28 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 22.

29 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 54.

30 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 54.



or a parliamentary committee the Australia scholarships alumni will be on that radar.<sup>31</sup>

7.31 The database will not include all international students studying in Australia but only those who have come in through these specialist programs.<sup>32</sup> Ms Buffington acknowledged the large number of people who could form an international network of former students but explained the reason for concentrating on a specific group:

In places like Malaysia we are now talking about a million people who would have an Australian qualification. So we are specifically targeting the Endeavour, Australian scholarships and Colombo Plan type scholars for that particular activity. The universities and other institutions also do a wonderful job in trying to stay in touch with their alumni and have very positive engagements. We are usually aware of that. So it is not that we are trying to duplicate that. We have a very elite group as part of the Colombo, Endeavour and Australian scholarships and we have broader alumni events. In the case of Vietnam, DEST has actually helped pay for the base of that alumni database in order to stay in touch. It will not be an all-encompassing thing. We will lose the opportunity of why we are trying to target these people for these Endeavour scholarships if we try to make them feel part of an alumni of a couple of million.<sup>33</sup>

7.32 It should be noted that Mr March informed the committee that:

...the white paper analysis process did clearly signal to the aid program that for modest investments you can get a potentially significant return by working through alumni networks and doing more with the people on return, and that is certainly what we are going to do with both leadership awards as well as the youth ambassadors.<sup>34</sup>

7.33 Even so, with regard to the Australian Leadership Awards, he noted that although AusAID was considering alumni opportunities, thoughts on that matter were, at this stage, still 'reasonably unformed'.<sup>35</sup>

7.34 Apart from the 'coordinated database' being developed by DEST, there were few if any other clearly defined activities designed specifically to build on and strengthen the connections established with former Australian educated overseas students. The language used in evidence was about possibilities—what could be done—not about what was being done. There was no mention about actual activities or achievements stemming from initiatives based around using alumni associations to enhance Australia's public diplomacy.

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31 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 57.

32 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 54.

33 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 58.

34 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 72.

35 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 70.

### **Committee view**

7.35 The committee not only supports programs such as the Australian Leadership Awards Program but also strongly endorses measures that would open up more opportunities for international students to study in Australia and for Australian students to study overseas. These education programs are important building blocks for Australia's public diplomacy.

7.36 As a group and as individuals occupying key positions in their communities, overseas graduates of Australian universities have the potential to be effective advocates for Australia—goodwill ambassadors who can help to build or strengthen bridges between Australia and other countries. Their knowledge and understanding would enable them to educate others in their communities about Australia and its people and help to dispel stereotypical or outdated notions.

7.37 Based on the findings of other parliamentary committees as mentioned above and evidence before this inquiry, the committee believes that the Australian Government should offer stronger and more effective support for the various alumni organisations for foreign students who have studied in Australia. The scope to build on their contribution to Australia's public diplomacy warrants much closer government consideration. This observation is supported by previous parliamentary committees that have noted or recommended that the government could 'take a more active role in working with Australian educational institutions to develop effective alumni programs'.<sup>36</sup>

7.38 The committee welcomes the development of a database of overseas students who have studied under the Australian Leadership Awards Program. It believes that this database should have the highest priority but the committee sees it as only the first step in the right direction.

### **Recommendation 3**

**7.39 The committee recommends that the government take a more active role in working with Australian educational institutions to develop stronger and more effective alumni programs for overseas students who have studied in Australia.**

### **Visitors programs**

7.40 There are also shorter term programs designed to bring people from other countries to Australia for visits or to draw groups of people together to converse on particular subjects. For example, the Coolum Forum is an initiative of the Australian and Thai Foreign Ministers designed to bring together East Asian leaders from business, politics, government and academia for an informal meeting in Australia. It provides an opportunity for these young and emerging leaders not only to talk about

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36 See Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *Opportunities and challenges: Australia's relationship with China*, November 2005, p. 291.

concerns that their countries share but to network and establish contact with counterparts throughout the region.

7.41 The following section looks in greater detail at a few of Australia's public diplomacy visitors' programs.

#### ***International media visits program and special visits program***

7.42 Under the International Media Visits Program, DFAT brings international journalists and commentators to Australia. In 2005–06, the program hosted 16 media visits involving 63 journalists. The aim of a visit may be very specific. For example, Mr Craig Burns, Executive Manager, International Division, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, noted that this program has given attention to the free trade agenda. He noted:

...groups of Chinese or Japanese journalists are brought to Australia, they travel around and see, in our particular area of interest, agriculture in Australia, to determine the level of threat that it might be to Chinese or Japanese agriculture or whatever the case may be. That is a clearly identifiable program within DFAT which does that directly by trying to get to the journalists in the other countries.<sup>37</sup>

7.43 A recent post report from Beijing not only referred to a similar visit by journalists from major newspapers including from Gansu and Henan provinces but recorded some of the public diplomacy benefits:

The visit resulted in 17 well-focused articles totalling around 17,000 words. The articles picked up on Australia's high-value, high-tech agricultural sector and our arguments that Australian agricultural output would not have the capacity to pose a significant threat to Chinese farmers, but would rather meet an existing gap in demand as well as supply new products to increasingly affluent consumers.<sup>38</sup>

7.44 DFAT's special visitors program is another activity designed to inform people from overseas about specific aspects of Australia. This program arranges for 'influential and potentially influential people' to meet Australian government, business and community figures. In 2005–06, DFAT organised 26 visits.

7.45 In addition, some visitors programs are run by agencies outside DFAT. Examples of these programs are discussed next.

#### ***The Australian Centre for Democratic Institutions***

7.46 The Australian Centre for Democratic Institutions conducts high-level courses for political leaders and officials from parliaments and political parties in the Asia

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37 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 72.

38 DFAT, answer to written question on notice, p. 71.

Pacific region. Dr Benjamin Reilly gave the example of having the heads of five of the main Islamist parties from Indonesia visit Australia. He advised the committee:

...on the first day we were going around and asking everyone what they wanted to achieve, and one of them said, 'Well, our objective is to introduce sharia law, so we want to find out how to get our objective up.' After two weeks in Australia and also mixing with people from the region, I think maybe that was not quite as high up on the priority list.<sup>39</sup>

In his view, people who visit Australia through programs conducted by the Centre 'come away with an improved perception of Australia'.<sup>40</sup>

### *Asialink conversations*

7.47 The Asialink conversations started in 2002 at the initiative of Asialink Patron, Mr Baillieu Myer AC. One of the main motivations in establishing this dialogue was 'to counter the perception that Australia had "turned its back on Southeast Asia", and to help identify new methods for strengthening Australia/ASEAN relations'.<sup>41</sup> Asialink has run three of these meetings: one in Australia, one in Malaysia and, most recently, in Ho Chi Minh City just after APEC. The meetings, which take place over a few days, bring together key leaders from ASEAN and Australia to discuss critical questions facing the region and beyond. According to Asialink:

...the term 'conversations' was chosen to suggest a very personal event, markedly different from the standard conference—a smaller, more intimate gathering designed to foster a frank and robust exchange of ideas and to build new networks and friendships.<sup>42</sup>

7.48 It believed that this type of activity needs more support and explained further some of the benefits gained from the project.<sup>43</sup>

...it is about the networking of the individuals and maintaining the contact with those individuals, because you invest an awful lot in them, both in identification and in then taking them to a place and giving them a good time and a meaningful experience of dialogue... We have robust discussions about the fact that our Indonesian colleagues think that we are attempting to balkanize them, and a lot of fairly robust discussion about our treatment of our Aboriginal community, and with that sort of discussion you do make

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39 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 36.

40 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 36.

41 Asialink, *2004 Asialink Conversations, Report of Proceedings*, Jim Leibold, rapporteur and editor, p. 3.

42 Asialink, *2004 Asialink Conversations, Report of Proceedings*, Jim Leibold, rapporteur and editor, p. 3.

43 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 4.

connections with people that are very different from a kind of stand-and-deliver conference.<sup>44</sup>

7.49 Ms Jennifer McGregor, Chief Executive Officer, Asialink, noted that the Asialink conversations produce a report which she regarded as important.<sup>45</sup> She indicated that the Coolum Forum does not. She also noted the importance of taking measures to ensure that the benefits flowing from the meeting continue into the future: that there is ongoing contact and follow-up activities to capitalise on the investment:

...when you are socialising with people for two and three days, you do form a bond. Our view is that you have to maintain that relationship with those people, so what we tend to do is then link those people with other programs that we are running—invite them back here to speak; if we have conferences in-country, we will invite them to speak. With subsequent conversations, we bring back members of the group together, not the whole group.<sup>46</sup>

### *Committee view*

7.50 The committee recognises the benefits to Australia's public diplomacy that derive from the many visitors' programs conducted by DFAT and other agencies. It notes the comments by Asialink about providing opportunities to build on the relationships formed during visits or meetings. The committee suggests that any future planning for a visitors or training program include as part of the plan consideration of measures for maintaining contact with those involved in the program and for further cultivating the relationships that have formed between the visitors and the hosts.

7.51 The report from the post in Beijing on a media visit to Australia by Chinese journalists provided an example of another measure that adds value to the various visitors programs—informative reporting on the results of the visit. The committee suggests that any plan for a visitors or training program recognise the longer-term benefits of such activities by requiring a report on the activity which includes an account of the public diplomacy benefits that flowed from the visit.

### **Recommendation 4**

**7.52 The committee recommends that:**

- **all visitors' or training programs sponsored or funded by the government have clearly identified public diplomacy objectives;**
- **DFAT ensure that all government sponsored or funded visitors' or training programs adopt a longer-term perspective and include measures or plans that are intended to consolidate and build on the immediate public diplomacy benefits that accrue from such activities; and**

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44 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 5.

45 See for example, Asialink, *2004 Asialink Conversations, Report of Proceedings*.

46 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 5.

- **as an accountability measure, the organisers or sponsors of a visitors' or training program report on how the program has contributed to Australia's public diplomacy.**

### **Speaking the language, understanding the culture**

7.53 Previous parliamentary inquiries have underscored the need to develop literacy in Asian languages as part of Australia's overall strategy to strengthen bilateral ties. Although the following observations relate to evidence taken in relation to the committee's inquiry into China, they apply to the other countries of Asia.

7.54 Many witnesses to the China inquiry believed that Australia was struggling to maintain its existing capacity to teach future generations of specialists, politicians and business leaders in Asian languages—particularly Chinese. They called on measures to be taken to improve the number of Australians competent not only in the Chinese language but also in their understanding of Chinese culture. A number of witnesses emphasised that China literacy needs to extend beyond language to knowledge of Chinese culture and philosophy.<sup>47</sup>

7.55 The JSCFADT came to the same conclusion about the importance of raising awareness in Australia about Indonesia and of ensuring that opportunities and incentives were made available to encourage Australians to study Indonesian language and culture. It recommended that:

Indonesian studies be designated a strategic national priority and that the Australian Research Council and Department of Education, Science and Training be requested to recognise this in prioritising funding for both research and teaching.<sup>48</sup>

7.56 On a broader scale, the same concerns were raised during this inquiry about Asian studies in Australia more generally. Mr Mirchandani observed that 'it is always easier to influence people if you understand their language and culture and speak their language and culture'.<sup>49</sup> He submitted:

Australian agencies have a range of expertise in languages which are currently largely being used for intelligence and related security roles, rather than in strategic communication. It would be of immense value if these language skills were harnessed in the greater sphere of public diplomacy. (An Australian voice, speaking in fluent and idiomatic Arabic on, say *Al Jazeera*, would carry much more weight than that voice speaking

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47 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *Opportunities and challenges: Australia's relationship with China*, March 2006, pp. 274–5.

48 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade, Foreign Affairs Sub Committee, *Near Neighbours—Good Neighbours*, May 2004, Canberra, p. 147.

49 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 46.

in English and having a translation appear as a subtitle—a translation which may not be as nuanced as the speaker would like.)<sup>50</sup>

7.57 He suggested that 'the creation of a school of languages for the specific purpose of public diplomacy would be an attractive career to many of today's school leavers and could easily fit into current curricula of Universities or Communications courses'.<sup>51</sup>

7.58 Ms McGregor was of the view that having Australians conversant in Asian languages particularly in Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean was of significant value to public diplomacy. She said that to 'have a cohort of very highly trained and capable people is very desirable in terms of public diplomacy'.<sup>52</sup> Even so, she noted that the status of Asian language education in Australia was a 'very vexed issue'. She explained:

A national languages policy was recently negotiated in Australia. There is a difficulty in terms of getting states and territories to commit to this area and to get quality teacher supply coordinated. We had a huge injection of funding through [the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools] NALSAS, but now the figures do not really reflect the value for money from that investment. It is not my personal area of expertise, but where we go from here I think is a very difficult area. It requires a huge investment for us to really develop critical mass in even, say, the four priority languages of Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean.<sup>53</sup>

7.59 Asialink did note in its submission, however, that at the school level:

Australia's commitment to ensure that future generations have a good understanding of the Asian region is international best practice. Australia has been ahead of all other Western countries in investing in this area of school reform necessary for an education for the 21st century.

Australia's commitment to Asia literacy, demonstrated through the long-term funding provided to the AEF, impresses representatives of Asian governments, Asian institutions and business...<sup>54</sup>

7.60 The committee recognises the need for government to continue to support the learning of languages, particularly Asian languages, in Australian educational institutions. It also encourages the government to consider introducing added incentives for Australian students not only to study an Asian language but to combine their studies with cultural studies.

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50 *Submission 2*, p. 4.

51 *Submission 2*, p. 5.

52 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 10.

53 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 10.

54 *Submission 8*, p. 4.

## **Recommendation 5**

**7.61 Consistent with the findings of previous parliamentary reports,<sup>55</sup> the committee recommends that the government consider introducing additional incentives for Australian students not only to study an Asian language but to combine their studies with cultural studies.**

## **Conclusion**

7.62 The committee has underlined two main elements that contribute to effective public diplomacy. The first is the importance of crafting and delivering messages and images that will be received and interpreted as intended—this presupposes that the messages and images are based on a sound understanding of the audience. Secondly, effective public diplomacy relies on strong and lasting people-to-people links.

7.63 There are many organisations, both state and non-state, engaged in activities that contribute to Australia's public diplomacy. They are, in their own distinctive way, conveying messages and images unique to their concerns and building their own relationships based on their particular interests. The following chapters examine how the activities of these many and varied organisations come together as a joint endeavour in understanding, informing and engaging with people from overseas.

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55 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *Opportunities and challenges: Australia's relationship with China*, March 2006, pp. 274–5. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade, Foreign Affairs Sub Committee, *Near Neighbours—Good Neighbours*, May 2004, Canberra, p. 147.