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From: Marika Vicziany [<mailto:Marika.Vicziany@adm.monash.edu.au>]
Sent: Friday, 10 October 2008 6:17 AM
To: Committee, JSCFADT (REPS); Marika Vicziany
Subject: Australia's Relationship with India

Dear Dr Kerley

Many thanks for your letter of 24 July 2008. I apologise for the delayed response.

I would like to add one item to update my evidence to the "Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with India as an Emerging World Power" under the following heading:

URGENT NEED FOR A BILATERAL CULTURAL AGREEMENT

In early 2008 the Monash Asia Institute, of which I am the Director, began working with the office of the new Indian Consul General in Melbourne to develop the concept of a new Australia India Cultural Centre to be based in the city of Melbourne. Since the concept was articulated, we have completed a feasibility study for this and plan to announce it during the Diwali dinner being hosted by the Australia India Business Council on 18th October.

In the process of preparing this report, my colleagues and I became aware of the disadvantages suffered by Australia from the lack of a bilateral cultural agreement between Australia and India. This acts as a great constraint on bilateral relations, by preventing Indian bodies such as the ICCR - Indian Council for Cultural Relations - having a regular and funded program of cultural exchange with Australia. As it happens, the ICCR has been very generous in sending us visiting scholars, musicians, dancers etc but without a bilateral agreement we cannot plan such visits or exchanges because we cannot assume that a regular program is feasible. Other countries that DO have such a bilateral agreement must, of necessity, be accorded priority.

I strongly urge that the need for a bilateral agreement on cultural exchange be placed high onto the Australia India agenda. This is because not only is Indian culture of intrinsic interest to Australians (including a growing Indian diaspora) but also because cultural exchange provides one of the most meaningful ways of talking to India at a time when its cultural influence is growing throughout the world. Moreover, a great deal of business between Australia and India is directly pertinent to an enhanced cultural exchange on both sides. Not only do Australia and India share a growing number of business interests based on cultural productions - eg movies - but culture more generally is a critical part of all of our other bilateral relationships. This has been well understood by the British, French, Germans and Americans who maintain large cultural institutes inside India - eg the British Council, the Goethe Institute etc. Australia lacks the financial resources to house handsome institutes of this kind

in India, but a great deal could be achieved under the auspices of a Bilateral Cultural Agreement.

One could articulate the need for an Australia India Bilateral Cultural Agreement as an important way of projecting Australian 'soft power' into the South Asian region and Indian 'soft power' into Australasia. Certainly Australia's profile in India needs to be developed - we have many interests in what is now widely agreed to be the largest emerging economy after China. Diversifying our cultural and economic engagement with Asia is important, and the proposed Bilateral Cultural Agreement is one of the most creative ways of doing this.

I would be happy to add further details should your committee request this.

With best wishes

Marika Vicziany