



The University of Melbourne

## **ASIALINK'S SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE & CONDUCT OF AUSTRALIA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

January 2007

### **SECTION 1: BACKGROUND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN A CHALLENGING AND CHANGING ENVIRONMENT**

Australia spends just 17 cents per capita on cultural diplomacy, compared to Germany which spends approximately \$3, and the UK, which spends an impressive \$19 per capita<sup>1</sup>. In this context, this Senate inquiry in identifying Australia's current work in public diplomacy and seeking new opportunities to expand and increase the impact of Australia's public diplomacy could not be more timely.

Australia's geographic distance from world centres makes public diplomacy even more important. Given the importance of the Asian region to Australia, strategically, economically and politically, Asialink firmly believes that public diplomacy in this region is arguably the most strategic and logical investment for Australia, and therefore it should be the top priority for our public diplomacy efforts, accompanied by appropriate investments.

Public Diplomacy is also no longer the domain of governments alone, as companies, universities and other institutions become more internationally focused and dependent. Increasingly public-private partnerships are proving instrumental in the promotion of Australia overseas. Collaboration between government, NGOs, universities and the private sector is now clearly identified as the way of the future as all parties share networks, expertise and experience and all benefit strategically from an enhanced image of Australia abroad.

Asian governments and other institutions are increasingly recognising the importance of international public diplomacy - and investing accordingly. Countries such as Singapore and Korea are dramatically increasing spending in line with their European counterparts. A disturbing trend is the increasing under-representation of Australia in significant regional events. For example:

- Singapore Biennale 2006 had 46 Asian artists, 25 EuroAmerican, 22 others and 1 Australian;
- Shanghai Biennale 2006 had 49 Asian artists, 39 EuroAmerican, 4 others and 1 Australian;
- Taipei Biennale 2006 had 25 Asian artists, 14 EuroAmerican, and no Australians.

The investment by the Chinese Government in the establishment of over 120 Confucius Institutes in almost 50 countries and regions is also an example of the increased focus of China on their reputation and image in the world. The Chinese Government ambitiously intends to establish 1000 Confucius Institutes by 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> Comparison of Central Government funding for "cultural diplomacy" - including appropriate DFAT, Australia Council and Bi-lateral agency funding in Australia compared to like-agencies the Goethe Institute and the British Council.

Growing collaboration is occurring between Asia and Europe. Groups such as the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) are growing in scale and impact, but exclude Australia, despite our presence in the Asian region.

And the environment is changing. Technology is revolutionising global connectivity and engagement, particularly between young generations. Faster and more innovative technology is now constantly updating, enabling communities and colleagues to communicate faster, reducing obstacles of distance, language and time-zones, and engaging sections of the community more vigorously than mediums past.

In this challenging and changing environment, Asialink acknowledges the excellent work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and their dedication to the promotion of Australia overseas.

## **SECTION 2: ASIALINK'S OWN CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

Asialink, has been working for 16 years promoting Australia-Asia engagement and understanding. Our experience working in partnership with government, business, philanthropy, academia and the media to create and manage programs in education, arts, corporate and public programs and health and community make us a key stakeholder. We welcome the opportunity to document achievements and propose opportunities for enhancing Australia's public diplomacy

### **2.1 Asialink Arts Program**

Asialink Arts works to increase the accessibility of Australian culture in Asia – and of Asia in Australia, whilst also encouraging partnerships between Australian and Asian organizations and individuals. The program works to promote Australia's sophisticated and contemporary culture and advanced economy. The Arts program is supported through DFAT either as a core funder or as a contributing funder through the bi-lateral agencies.

#### **Asialink Residency Program**

Asialink sends over 35 leading Australian artists, craftspeople, performers, directors, choreographers, writers, musicians and arts managers to live and work for up to four months in Asia each year. Since its inception in 1991, Asialink has sent 406 residents to 242 host organisations in Asia, across 18 countries.

#### **Visual Arts Exhibition Touring**

The Visual Arts / Craft Program is the largest exhibition touring program from Australia to Asia, aimed at reinforcing an image of Australia as a sophisticated and advanced economy. The program receives tri-annual funding of \$130,000 from DFAT's Cultural Relations Branch.

Since 1991 Asialink has toured 72 exhibitions in partnership with 44 galleries and independent curators touring to 216 venues in 18 countries of Asia. In these the work of 478 Australian and Asian artists have been shown to audiences numbering in the hundreds of thousands and through the media, millions. A new focus has been technology-focused projects in video, computer based work and collaborations aimed at youth audiences.

#### **Asialink Literature Program**

The Asialink Literature Program, funded from 2002 to 2006 by the Australia Council, is the only program in Australia dedicated to the promotion of Australian literature in the Asian

region. This program has delivered significant benefits in touring 34 authors including Geraldine Brooks, Tim Winton, Peter Carey and Doris Pilkington Garimara in Taiwan, China, Korea, Japan, Singapore and India. It promotes Australia through book fairs and other touring opportunities including the major country focus at the 2007 Calcutta Book Fair and through direct rights sales; it establishes relationships and increases understanding of Australian culture and history in the region, with, to date, over 135 media interviews and 210 events attracting over 320,000 people.

In 2007, the future of this highly successful program is in jeopardy. Without government support Australian literature is at risk of not being promoted in Asia, despite the increasing interest in this market from Europe and the USA.

### **New Media**

Asialink is developing a New Media program with the Australia Council to start in 2007 focusing on cross-media and cross-cultural collaborations between 20 artists from North Asia, Singapore and Australia.

## **2.2 Asialink's Asia Education Foundation**

School education provides a major opportunity for Australia's public diplomacy to build and strengthen international collaboration, security and harmony into the future. Asialink's school education program, the Asia Education Foundation<sup>2</sup> works to achieve this vision through engaging students and their teachers with the Asian region and promoting greater knowledge and understanding between cultures.

### **Teacher study tours and exchange programs**

AEF exchange programs and study tours between Australia and Indonesia, India, Republic of Korea, China, Vietnam, Japan, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia bring school educators from the region to visit Australia for short stays. These include a briefing program on Australia, homestay and school hosting and sending Australian teachers into Asia to learn about the countries first hand so that they can teach about them with some knowledge and confidence. Over 2000 Australian teachers have participated in these programs, working in partnership with local education authorities in Australia and Asia.

Such programs lead to ongoing school to school and teacher to teacher links, foster mutual understanding with a broad section of the school community (including parents) and resource school curriculum about the participating countries.

### **Asia Education Foundation and National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools.**

The AEF maintains a national network of government and non-government school jurisdictions in Australia committed to the inclusion of the studies of Asia across the curriculum, Kindergarten to Year 12. This is a long-term school reform strategy initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training since 1992. This initiative actively contributes to the development of an Australian school curricula for the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflective of both Eastern and Western knowledge and understandings and therefore relevant to our children's future. Led by the Federal Minister, all state and territory Ministers of Education endorsed the *National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools* in December 2005.

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<sup>2</sup> The Asia Education Foundation (AEF) is a joint activity of Asialink at The University of Melbourne and Curriculum Corporation funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. The AEF works to lead, promote and support the study of Asia across the curriculum in Australian schools.

### **Australia's commitment to the inclusion of studies of Asia in school curriculum.**

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 21<sup>st</sup> century. Other countries such as the USA, UK and parts of Europe are only now beginning to invest in curriculum reform to include languages and studies of Asia – especially China.

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 and has been profiled through international conferences in Asia and Europe, to delegations and high profile visitors to Australia and through Australian embassies and consulates in the region.

### **AEF's Linking Latitudes Conference**

Since 1997 the AEF's series of *Linking Latitudes* conferences have attracted over 1200 educators to conferences in Bali, Shanghai, Hanoi and Delhi (October 2007) for Australian teachers to learn about the conference country. *Linking Latitudes* has worked in partnership with Ministries of Education in each country and provided an impressive public diplomacy vehicle to showcase Australia's commitment to knowing about the region.

## **2.3 Asialink's Corporate & Public Programs**

Asialink's Corporate & Public Program brings together voices from business, government, academia, media and the community to provide access to new knowledge and understanding, potential markets and future partners, as well as initiating a number of second track initiatives.

### **Second Track Initiatives**

Events such as the Asialink Conversations play an important role in public diplomacy by providing a significant opportunity for leaders in business, government and the community to share open and creative conversations with their counterparts around the region. Inaugurated in 2002, the Conversations have taken place in Australia, Malaysia and in 2006, in Vietnam where Prime Minister John Howard addressed the closing dinner.

Asialink has also developed an important second track initiative in conjunction with the APEC Conference in September this year, to which DFAT has agreed to contribute seeding funding. This Conference, APEC 2020, is aimed at current to mid-career leaders from all APEC countries coming together to discuss issues facing the region.

In addition, Asialink has been requested to deliver the Coolum Forum in Thailand this year – a high level dialogue between East Asian young leaders in government, politics, academia and for the first time in 2007, also involving senior business leaders.

### **Asialink Lectures and Corporate Programs**

The Sidney Myer Asia Centre, where Asialink is located, is dedicated to the promotion of public understanding and engagement between Australia and Asia through public lectures and forums. Asialink encourages mutual understanding between Asian leaders and the corporate sector through business briefings, keynote events and private forums whereby business leaders can gain new information, exchange views and build networks. In 2006, Asialink facilitated 90 such events.

### **Asialink Leadership Program**

Operating for over 12 years, the Asialink Leaders Program prepares a network of emerging leaders from the corporate, government and not-for-profit sectors with skills to lead Australia into the region and to operate successfully across cultures and borders.

## **2.4 Asialink's Health Program**

Mental illnesses cause immense suffering to individuals and their families. At the same time the staggering economic and social costs of mental illness are common to all countries. There is growing realisation that this problem cannot be solved alone and is best solved through collaborations across sectors and nations. Asialink's health program, Asia-Australia Mental Health, is developing a new regional network involving mental health professionals and representatives from the government, corporate and the not-for-profit sectors of the Asia-Pacific region aimed at reducing the private and public burden of mental illness.

## **SECTION 3: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING AUSTRALIA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

### **3.1 Asia must be Australia's Top Focus**

Whilst there are numerous competing priorities for Australia's public diplomacy, no region is more strategic geographically, politically and economically, than Asia. Therefore, this region must be the top focus of Australia's public diplomacy efforts going forward, and this vision needs to be communicated clearly to all agencies, partners and stakeholders. It is important to note that Australia Council funding for Asia was 35% of their international spend in 1993 and was down to 23% in 2006 (currently available figures).

### **3.2 Invest More In Asia's Changing Environment**

Asia is now more internationally competitive and fast becoming a global centre of gravity leading innovation in many fields. Public diplomacy is getting increased funding support from Asian governments and regional groups, Australia is well placed given our geography and strong relations in the region, but we need to invest more strategically and with more resources to take advantage of our current connections, particularly given the increasing competition from other parts of the world.

### **3.3 Expanding Public Diplomacy through Partnerships**

Given the fundamental benefit of involving the private sector, universities, NGOs, and other interested parties in public diplomacy, it is recommended that further resources and support are provided to facilitate public-private partnerships in public diplomacy. Asialink's experience in working across governments, corporate and philanthropic supporters and the academic community has demonstrated that this type of collaboration provides significant benefits for all parties. We believe that there is much scope for even greater outcomes. For example the Asialink Conversations, Vietnam 2006 were a partnership

between the Myer Foundation, the University of Melbourne, RMIT Vietnam, The Vietnamese Peace and Development Foundation with funding from BHP Billiton and Singapore Airlines and the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, providing tangible benefits for all parties.

### **3.4 Resources for Evaluation of Impact of Initiatives**

Asialink has had difficulty sourcing credible qualitative or quantitative research on the impact of public diplomacy initiatives. Whilst public opinion surveys are increasingly becoming available from Australian and international sources, there is insufficient investment in studying the effectiveness of alternative public diplomacy strategies and interventions. Such investment would assist both government and partner agencies in decision making and resource allocation.

In contrast current government funding reporting requirements can be unduly onerous and wasteful. An example is Asialink's Australia Japan Visual Arts Exchange 2002-5. Government grants of \$500k enabled Asialink to raise an additional \$1.5m for the 3 year program. 32 separate reports were required for DFA&T and the Australia Council over the 3 years. Common reporting requirements across government agencies would save time and costs.

### **3.5 Achieving Greater Efficiency and Broader Reach Across Asia**

There is scope for greater co-ordination between the federal agencies involved in public diplomacy and between the federal and state agencies. An example is Asialink's Visual Arts Touring program where a planned and collaborative approach from DFAT's Foundations, Councils and Institutes and Cultural Relations Branch would enable us to significantly expand the reach and impact of the program through strategic regional or multilateral touring.

## **SECTION 4: PRACTICAL INITIATIVES FOR ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT**

### **4.1 Media Exchanges**

Asialink ran The Medialink Fellowship Program from 1999 until 2004 to contribute to the strengthening of Asia - Australia understanding and relationships and to the professional development of the media in Australia and the region. The program assisted up to 10 mid-career journalists each year from Australia, Indonesia, India and China, to live and work for up to 12 weeks in another country and culture.

Past Medialink fellows praised the program for the quality and depth of opportunity to understand the host country and culture but the program was not able to attract sustainable funding to continue.

Asialink's work in this sector is now limited to managing the SEAMEO-Australia Press Award in partnership with SEAMEO, DEST and the Australian Embassy in Bangkok. This award recognizes excellent coverage of education issues by journalists in Southeast Asia and offers a short term placement for one Fellow annually at a media organization in Australia.

A final evaluation of the Medialink program suggested the following ideas for a new Medialink program should new funding become available. A re-branded Medialink program funded through DFAT's Public Diplomacy initiatives could offer:

i) A highly-prestigious, one-off annual national scholarship or award for mid level to senior journalists modelled along the lines of the current Fulbrights, or Knight International Press Fellowships promoted in such a way that it has the standing and promotional reputation of the current Walkley Awards.

ii) Short-term visits or tours to Asian countries by mid-career working journalists from Australia. The program could take up to six journalists on a two to three week tour of one Asian country and the focus would be on increasing cultural and political understanding of that country, with perhaps one specific issue in mind.

## **4.2 Re-instating the Asialink Literature Program**

We need to build on current achievements to ensure that there is a continued profile and presence of Australian literature in the region as part of the broader vision and interest of Australia in Asia. Government support is essential in this area.

## **4.3 More Support for Second Track Initiatives**

Asialink is proud of our contribution to second track initiatives, such as the prestigious Asialink Conversations, and this year, we are looking forward to facilitating the APEC 2020 Conference as we believe that this is an important initiative which will build on the outcomes of the APEC Leaders Forum in September.

Second track initiatives are extremely important in facilitating exchanges and building relationships across the region. Government support both financially and in-kind greatly assists organizations such as Asialink to deliver these vital events.

## **4.4 Engaging Youth: Utilising New Technologies**

A 2005 Report by the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy found that “in today’s world, it is not enough for public diplomacy practitioners to say they have a presence on the Internet. Practitioners need to constantly engage appropriate technologies that will reach key audiences and think ahead in technology and embrace innovations”<sup>3</sup>.

Given Australia’s geographic isolation, new technologies could provide an innovative way to leverage our public diplomacy efforts through new media and delivery systems such as blogs, interactive digital channels, wireless technologies which enable users to access web content via their mobile phones, podcasting etc.

For example, communication technology is now integrated into teaching and learning in all Australian schools and in many schools across Asia. This provides multiple opportunities to connect school students and their teachers in Australia and Asia using new technologies. Mutual knowledge and understanding can be substantially enhanced through Australian government investment in international electronic curriculum projects focused on shared interests including climate, identity, migration, youth culture, family etc. Priority countries could be identified - eg trade priorities including China, India and Japan and Islamic countries including Indonesia and Pakistan.

In order to involve young adults, new technologies are also proving highly successful through the development of collaborative virtual communities. In these virtual spaces like-minded people congregate, communicate and collectively build projects and enterprises.

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<sup>3</sup> The United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, Washington, 2005 Report, [www.state.gov/r/adcompd](http://www.state.gov/r/adcompd)

For example AsiaGroove.com, a virtual village for people interested in Asian pop culture, receives 120 million page hits a month with 3,000-4000 young people registering daily.

The potential for public diplomacy engaging young people via this use of technology is limitless. A virtual open space could be established aimed at building Asia-Australia engagement and catering for a range of interest groups and purposes.

## **SECTION 5: CONCLUSION**

As Australia's leading organization for the promotion of Australia-Asia understanding and engagement, Asialink is pleased to participate in this Senate Inquiry into the nature and conduct of Australia's public diplomacy. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the above opportunities and practical initiatives that we believe can enhance the current excellent work undertaken by government bodies, particularly the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.