

Diasporas and the Commonwealth

# 5<sup>th</sup> DIVERSITY MATTERS

*a commonwealth forum on cultural diversity*

Monash Malaysia Sunway Campus  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
19-20 November 2008

Forum Report



The Statesman



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# Background

Diversity Matters Malaysia was the fifth in a series of Commonwealth Forums held every two years since 2001. The fifth forum, entitled **Diasporas in the Commonwealth**, was held on November 19 and 20, 2008, at the Monash University Sunway campus in Kuala Lumpur.

The fifth Diversity Matters Forum was organised by the Australian Multicultural Foundation in conjunction with Monash University and the Commonwealth Foundation, with support from India's *The Statesman* and the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI). The Forum attracted a distinguished list of speakers presenting a breadth of analyses and discussions on diasporas in the Commonwealth. The conference was particularly honoured in having His Royal Highness Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, Crown Prince of Perak Darul Ridzuan present the keynote address.

The thought provoking presentations spearheaded the lively exchanges at the Forum's four workshops producing several practical and achievable outcomes and recommendations for the Commonwealth. The recommendations will inform future Commonwealth discussions, including the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Malaysia, June, 2009, and to the Commonwealth People's Forum in Trinidad and Tobago, November 2009.

The fifth Diversity Matters Forum partners were The Australian Multicultural Foundation, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements, Monash University Malaysia, The Statesman (India), and Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute.

The forum organisers wish to give special thanks to Professor James Chin for coordination of the event, and to the staff and associates of the Monash University Sunway Campus for their assistance.

The organisers also wish to thank all keynote speakers, plenary speakers and workshop chairs for their excellent presentations and the delegates for their attendance and invaluable contribution to the forum.

# **Main Forum Recommendations**

**Key recommendations that resulted from the forum are:**

- 1. A new definition of diaspora should be identified and promoted, with the understanding that voluntary movement and self-identification is intrinsic to contemporary diaspora;**
- 2. Research should continue to explore the impact of diasporas on economies, societies and structure, culture, development and communications;**
- 3. The media should be better educated on diasporas to promote greater awareness;**
- 4. Education systems should provide the opportunity and curriculum to recognise and offer education on diasporas;**
- 5. Health issues related with diasporas should be further explored;**
- 6. More attention needs to be given to policy development in order to ensure that fundamental human rights are protected, respected and promoted.**

# DAY ONE

**Master of Ceremonies**

**Mr Benjamin Mc Kay, Sunway Campus Monash University**

## **Welcome and Introduction**

**Dr B. Hass Dellal, OAM Executive Director of the Australian**

**Multicultural Foundation**, as chair of the Diversity Matters Forum Committee welcomed speakers, delegates and distinguished guests. Dr Dellal presented delegates with background information to the *Diversity Matters Forums*. The Fifth Diversity Matters Forum would build on the success of previous forums held in Brisbane (2001), London (2003), Kolkata (2005) and in Johannesburg (2007). He suggested that the Forum on diasporas presented a timely opportunity to influence the Commonwealth's agenda on a topic where there has been little institutional thinking. Dr Dellal emphasised the importance of exploring the role of diasporas in helping achieve the Commonwealth's vision and mandates and the part diasporas can play in shaping and implementing Commonwealth programmes. Dr Dellal's concluding remarks demonstrated that diasporas present unique opportunities for policy makers in the areas of social cohesion, welfare, development and education. Dr Dellal invited Professor James Chin to welcome the delegates on behalf of Sunway Campus Monash University Malaysia.

**Professor James Chin, Head of School of Arts and Social Sciences,**

**Sunway Campus Monash University**, welcomed delegates to the Monash University Sunway Campus. Professor Chin highlighted Monash University's large and diverse student population and its two overseas campuses – Kuala Lumpur and Johannesburg.

## **Keynote Address**

**Chair - Sir James Gobbo AC CVO, Australian Multicultural Foundation**, opened the conference and introduced the keynote speaker, His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince.

### **Summary of Keynote Address**

**His Royal Highness Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, Crown Prince of Perak Darul Ridzuan**

His Royal Highness highlighted diversity as essential in promoting the growth of knowledge. He noted that, from an economic perspective, international migration expands global output and increases global welfare. His Royal Highness pointed out, however, the many problematic issues arising from diversity. On the one hand skilled immigrants receive credit for spurring innovation, yet on the other, immigrants are often blamed for disrupting civil society, draining public coffers and lowering wages.

His Royal Highness noted that while emigration brings financial benefits in the form of remittances to the country of origin, it has also drained poor economies of skilled and educated workers. His Royal Highness talked about India as the largest example of a diaspora enriched as well as enriching country and noted that successful immigrants sometimes return to their homelands and create new businesses, thereby acting as growth catalysts. On the flip side, for the receiving countries, the economic gains can be enormous. His Royal Highness commented that diasporas are consistent with pluralistic countries which not only tolerate but appreciate and encourage the active participation of different races, cultures and lifestyles. Fundamental to the creation of a pluralistic society are two principles: equality and fairness. His Royal Highness added that to ensure that these two principles are enacted the rule of law is required. The principles of equality and fairness suggest a preferred policy of integration rather than assimilation. His Royal Highness added that the integrationist path to nation building is a difficult one as there are those whose primary response to diversity is to pound those who are dissimilar into submission. His Royal Highness described integration as a gradual process consisting of many acts over many generations and added that diversity must be promoted at every level. He said that democratic life is characterised by allowing the individual to decide whether he or she wants to adjust more and be absorbed or remain aloof. At the same time, the need to forge a community of people with shared values and interests remains paramount. His Royal Highness closed by saying that multicultural societies are fast becoming the rule rather than the exception, however, mankind is failing at creating a sense of community. He said that we must avoid falling into a new and destructive form of modern day tribalism and we must reject radicalism and extremism of all types.

## **Opening Comments**

### **Sir James Gobbo AC CVO The Australian Multicultural Foundation Summary**

In his opening remarks Sir James Gobbo highlighted the significance of diasporas in the Commonwealth due to the magnitude of movement of people to and from member countries over the decades. He described the meaning of the word ‘diaspora,’ to scatter or sow seeds and reflected that if seeds fall upon good ground they will yield a good harvest. He commented on the importance of cultural and religious traditions in supporting new settlers and enriching the host country, stating, however, that maintenance of culture and religion is contingent on a commitment to uphold the laws and political institutions of the host country. Sir James Gobbo acknowledged that enlightened Governments have demonstrated that good programs and policies can overcome prejudice and prevent second generation diasporas from turning against their host countries and vice versa. In conclusion, Sir James Gobbo emphasised that diasporas have been a force for good and have advanced civilised values.

**Mr Ravindra Kumar**  
**The Statesman**  
**Summary**

Mr Kumar began by citing figures on the Indian diaspora and noted that there are 23 million Indians residing outside of their home country, constituting a significant part of the diaspora within the Commonwealth. Mr Kumar asked delegates to imagine a scenario where every Indian immigrant returned to India. He suggested that the impact on India in terms of social cohesion would not be great, but host countries would experience a 'tsunami' effect. Mr Kumar said that workforces would be seriously depleted and industries would lose large numbers of skilled employees. He stated that for the first time there is a growing awareness within India of its diaspora due largely to the sheer size of remittances coming into India. Mr Kumar said that there is now an Overseas Indian Ministry looking into the Indian diaspora with great interest. He said that it is important to examine the effects of host communities that are unable to manage their diasporas and are unable to achieve social cohesion. Mr Kumar asked how can more young people be attracted to study and conduct research into the movement of people with the object of achieving social cohesion.

**Dr Mark Collins**  
**Commonwealth Foundation**  
**Summary**

Dr Collins acknowledged that the Commonwealth was founded on the movement of people. He added that there is a need for greater understanding of transnational connections and belongings in terms of building social cohesion. He emphasised that this is a new era for the Commonwealth and the current Forum is a timely one as there is a real opportunity to influence the Commonwealth to take the first steps towards grappling with this modern reality of transnational belongings and connections. Dr Collins remarked that the challenge lies in discovering what this means for the Commonwealth and what may have to change to accommodate this modern reality. Dr Collins added that the Commonwealth needs to ascertain how diaspora communities can contribute in taking forward the Commonwealth's agenda to enhance development, democracy and cultural understandings. Dr Collins urged the Forum delegates to arrive at practical and detailed recommendations which can be taken up by Commonwealth governments. He concluded by saying that the Commonwealth is listening and will be taking the messages from this Forum forward in 2009.

# **Session One - General Perspectives and Overview**

**Chair: Dr Mark Collins  
Commonwealth Foundation**

## **Professor Graeme Hugo University of Adelaide Summary**

Professor Hugo opened the first session with an Australian perspective on diasporas. He commenced with a definition of the term 'diaspora' and pointed out its Greek origin 'to colonise'. He said that, until recently, diaspora was used to refer to a group of people who are linked by common ethno-linguistic and/or religious bonds who have left their homeland and have developed an identity and solidarity in exile. More recently, Professor Hugo said that theorists co-mingle contemporary diasporas with issues of transnationalism and globalisation. Characteristics including retaining relationship with their real or imagined homeland; an awareness of group identity; the existence of the diaspora beyond the first generation; and expatriates who are spread over more than one destination, qualify as markers of contemporary diaspora. Professor Hugo highlighted a current shift in the paradigm away from permanent settlement migration to transnationalism. He added that research is moving away from immigration at the destination towards a focus on the ties between the origin and the destination. Professor Hugo pointed out that return migration and circular migration have risen to greater significance; however, there is little data on emigration and destination and that host nations do not have sufficient information on their diasporas.

Professor Hugo said there was also a shift from a focus on the 'brain drain' to an increasing consideration of the positive effects of emigration through remittances, knowledge transfer, trade and other benefits. Professor Hugo went on to discuss the Australian diaspora as highly skilled and educated, young adults with a high level of return. He talked about the dilemma facing some expatriates who feel they fall between two cultures or manage multiple identities. He said that group identity was high amongst many Australian expatriates and that maintenance of their identity was through groups, the web and through the emergence of an expatriate culture. Professor Hugo discussed the diaspora living in Australia as large immigrant communities with varying degrees of identification with their native countries.

Professor Hugo said there is now an understanding of the potential for migrants to help transform their native countries. There is awareness that countries can create 'triple wins', for migrants, for their countries of origin and for the societies that receive them. Professor Hugo added that the diaspora can be a vehicle for knowledge transfer, for economic growth and for development assistance. He discussed the policy implications for the diaspora in Australia and overseas and asked whether Australia can institute policies which facilitate not just the development of the

diaspora within Australia but facilitate the role the diaspora can play globally. In conclusion, Professor Hugo said that nations can no longer afford to follow development policies which are exclusively domestic in focus but must also encompass the development of poorer countries.

**Professor Kee PooKong**  
**Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University**  
**Summary**

Professor Pookong began with an overview of the evolution and characteristics of diaspora and presented causes for diasporic displacements. He then discussed the analytical and practical concepts associated with the phenomenon of diaspora. The analytical concept provides insight into the history of human experience – dispersion, identity, longing and return. The practical concept identifies the interest to states in terms of political, economic or cultural mobilisation, to international organisations in terms of development, and to international relations. Professor Pookong discussed the Chinese and Indian diasporas and highlighted the fundamental differences between the two diasporas, commenting that India has been more comfortable than China in recognising its diaspora. He said that, unlike Chinese people, Indians are more widely scattered globally, whereas Chinese emigration has traditionally concentrated around the south east Asia region.

Some of the challenges raised by Professor Pookong reiterated those stated by His Royal Highness, such as questions of inclusivity, multiculturalism and globalisation facing both sending and receiving countries. Professor Pookong said that international bodies are now seeing migration diasporas as an instrument for democratisation, development and as demographic change agents.

In conclusion, Professor Pookong referred to an Indian poem which used the Holy Banyan tree as a metaphor to describe the Indian diaspora: to understand the vitality of a people you should not just look at the original root but you should be looking at the roots coming from the branches. He said that the Chinese also have used the ‘tree’ as a metaphor for the migration of people.

## **Session Two - Social cohesion and inclusion: Engaging with faith, identity and integration**

**Chair: Dr. Helen E.S. Nesadurai**  
**Monash Malaysia**

### **Dr Howard Duncan Metropolis Project Summary**

Dr Duncan highlighted the growth over the past 25 years of transnational communities and of transnational enclaves throughout the world, which raises both theoretical and practical issues regarding the integration of ethnic and religious minority groups. He said that for most liberal democratic countries in the West, the dominant approach to integration is to remove the barriers separating the mainstream from the minorities, be those barriers with regard to language, access to services, access to rights protection, access to employment, and freedom from discrimination. As enclaves grow in population and in economic and cultural strength, they become an increasingly attractive competitor to the mainstream for the integration allegiances of newcomer populations. In some contemporary enclaves, immigrants can find not only supportive members of their co-ethnic and co-linguistic community, but lucrative employment, a full range of health, education, and social services, and attractive housing and neighbourhoods. The attractions of these middle class enclaves are such that there has been a significant amount of self-segregation in some societies of recent migrants. This has caused some commentators and political leaders to express concern over social cohesion and people living parallel lives, concerns that have led to strong calls for fuller integration of immigrants into the societal mainstream.

Dr Duncan said that for the past 10-15 years, it has been religious minority groups that have received the most attention and about which those who are concerned with integration are giving most of their attention. He noted that when we speak of integration with respect to language, employment, access to services and freedom from discrimination, we are speaking about all residents and citizens of a society having access to the same fundamentals, be they the fundamentals found in law, in a common language or in a common labour market. But when we speak of religion, we cannot in a contemporary liberal democracy speak of integration with respect to a common religion. The very concept of liberal democracy implies freedom of belief and association, these two implying religious freedom.

A modern state with a religiously diverse population may at times need to rule on the primacy of protecting religious belief and the rule of law. Normally, it is the rule of law that is primary, which is to say that actions in the name of religious belief must be within what the laws of the state permit. Secular states have an advantage in offering protection for religious freedoms. Secularism offers guarantees of religious freedom – this is inherent in the concept of secularism – and in turn demands that religious organizations and their followers adhere to secular values as expressed in state constitutions and other legal instruments that prescribe the fundamental rights and

freedoms of the state. In a secular system are found legal principles to protect religious expression and belief. Integration of religious difference in a secular state is relatively straightforward. However, where a state's civic laws are grounded in a system of specific religious belief and religious law, religious pluralism can present a more difficult challenge because such states will normally assume the superiority of one religion over all others.

Dr Duncan argued that, in pluri-religious situations, the state must protect religious freedom while protecting the political and legal foundations of the secular state, must promote religious tolerance, including tolerance of the non-religious, and promote the development of bridging social capital to overcome the possible pitfalls of religiously-demarcated enclaves.

Dr Duncan concluded by highlighting that integration requires the acceptance of the legal and political fundamentals of a secular society. The mutual acceptance of these creates a basis of common ground upon which the possibility of trust can be established. A basic trust is essential to the prosperity and elemental functioning of a society. In societies characterized by religious pluralism, the grounds of trust are most easily found in the principles underlying the secular state.

**Rev Dr Hermen Shastri**  
**Council of Churches of Malaysia**  
**Summary**

Dr Shastri began by saying that managing, respecting, and promoting diversity whether ethnic, religious or linguistic, are important attributes to democracy. However, he added, the management and promotion of democracy cannot be taken for granted. Malaysia, he said, was forged into a nation in 1957 by the deliberate inclusion of various diaspora including ethnic and religious-cultural communities. Dr Shastri said that in becoming a nation state these various diaspora communities came together in a common commitment and pledged to share a national identity. Dr Shastri said that diversity was not to be diminished but to be sustained and enhanced through common life. Dr Shastri said that viewed from this perspective the basis of social cohesion must incorporate both the management and sustainability of diversity.

**Dr Kris Rampersad**  
**Communications and Literary Consultant, Trinidad and Tobago**  
**Summary**

Dr Rampersad's presentation highlighted the inherent cross-fertilisation of religious practices in Trinidad and Tobago that distinguishes them from the ways the same religions are practiced elsewhere. Dr Rampersad said it is not uncommon for one religion to utilise the modes of the other in their services and rituals, which make the level of religious tolerance as veritably exemplary, if not unique to Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago's religious mix reflects the multifaceted nature of society and its ethnic mix, with a population of 1.31 million, which includes diasporas from Africa, India, China, Europe, Syria and Lebanon. Dr Rampersad said that Trinidad and Tobago itself is involved in spreading seeds that are spawning diasporas elsewhere, as in Caribbean diasporas in North America and Europe in particular.

The presentation looked at the processes of diaspora formation, including displacement, adaptation, and integration, and examined not only cultural, political, economic and social practices, which have absorbed much of the discourse about diaspora to date. In Trinidad and Tobago diasporas have also impacted on the way religions are expounded. Dr Rampersad made a case for analysis of religious tensions and tolerance in similar terms in other places where different peoples have come or were brought together to form societies.

With particular emphasis on the Indian diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Rampersad looked at not only the Feast of La Divina Pastora, but also other means of assimilation and integration of faith and beliefs of different religions, particularly through cultural practices, and how this contributes to strengthening the fabric of nationalism, diffuses tensions and promotes tolerance.

**Mr Jerald Joseph**  
**Pusat Komus, Malaysia**  
**Summary**

Mr Joseph presented a series of photographs from workshops aimed at challenging existing human rights structures. Mr Joseph said that citizenship in Malaysia is linked to cultural identity and gave the example where citizenship of more recently arrived migrants is less valued than that of others. He emphasised the need to reclaim political spaces where people can talk and share their experiences. He said that people feel threatened by some legislation and it is important to bring back the people's discourse. He emphasised making people comfortable with critical discussions, especially with so called 'sensitive issues'.

## **Breakout Session One - General Perspectives and Overview**

**Chair: Mr Sam Rajappa**  
**The Statesman**

The participants initiated the session with a discussion on a ‘proper’ and contemporary definition for the term ‘diaspora’. It was pointed out that there exists an uncertainty regarding what the concept of diaspora covers.

- Is it the movement of people?
- Does it primarily include people within a specified boundary?
- Does it encompass also encompass the children of the individuals residing offshore?
- Is the nation state the viable entity or is there something more?

It was mentioned that there is a varied range of understanding for different situations (example of Mexico) due to globalization.

Hence the definition is subjective in nature. Although researchers have given a rigid definition, the concept nonetheless evolves with time.

**Recommendations**

1. Define diaspora as applicable to current times (a contemporary definition).
2. Look for the best practices among Commonwealth countries
3. Request Commonwealth countries to support studies/research on diaspora in public/private universities/institutions of higher learning.

**Breakout Session Two – Social cohesion and inclusion**

**Chair: Dr Howard Duncan**  
**Metropolis Project**

**Conclusions**

1. Commonwealth countries must carefully distinguish between promoting diversity as a means to protect minority rights and as a means to separate communities. Commonwealth countries need to understand that implementing diversity policies or multicultural policies can result in either enhancing inclusion and social cohesion, or they can ultimately increase segregation. Programs must be designed to enhance inclusion and social cohesion.
2. In an environment of religious pluralism and a pluralism of values, social cohesion requires a framework upon which can be founded a sense of the common good. This framework is to be found in the legal and political

system, most effectively in secular states. The rule of law is essential to successful social cohesion.

3. Political leadership is instrumental in achieving social cohesion in environments of religious pluralism. Leaders must publicly protect religious freedom and promote mutual religious tolerance
4. The Commonwealth Foundation can help facilitate the creation of safe public discussions of diversity and safe public spaces wherein members of different groups can meet, raise awareness and knowledge, negotiate differences, and ultimately develop higher degrees of mutual trust.

## **Forum Dinner**

### **HE Penny Williams, Australian High Commissioner**

Conference dinner was addressed by Her Excellency, Penny Williams, High Commissioner of Australia. Penny welcomed the delegates to the forum on behalf of the Australian High Commission and expressed her support for the forum and opportunity to host the Forum Dinner.

The High Commissioner stressed the importance of the forum topic, Diasporas in the Commonwealth as being a significant area for discussion in identifying the unique opportunities for diasporas to contribute to social cohesion, development and education.

The High Commissioner spoke briefly about His Royal Highness Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, Crown Prince of Perak's presentation and concurred with him that multicultural societies are fast becoming the rule, rather than the exception. The High Commissioner congratulated the organisers and Sunway Monash Campus for hosting the forum in Malaysia.

Both Dr Hass Dellal and Prof. Stephanie Fahey thanked the High Commissioner for her support and advice, particularly assisting the organisers in issuing the invitation to His Royal Highness Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, Crown Prince to give the key note address.

## **Day Two**

### **Session Three - Education Diasporas**

**Chair: Associate Professor Dr Ong Puay Liu  
University Kebangsaan, Malaysia**

**Mr Sam Rajappa  
The Statesman  
Summary**

Mr Rajappa spoke from his experience as a journalist and also from his knowledge of the Indian diaspora particularly within the Fiji Islands.

The early Nineteenth Century, he stated, saw the rapid colonisation of far flung countries by European countries, notably Great Britain, and the abolition of slavery. The colonisers needed cheap labour to work the vast tracts of lands they had acquired in these colonies. In most of the colonies indigenous people were content with subsistent farming and not prepared for hard labour plantations required in the newly opened lands.

India, which had become a British colony by then, was facing severe famine year after year, and its workers were prepared to migrate to any part of the globe provided there was job opportunity. As the slave trade had been abolished, the British ingeniously coined the term 'indentured labour', which is a form of slave labour, and recruited a large number of people from the famine-hit areas of India to work in their newly acquired colonies.

The Fiji Islands are one such country where there was a steady flow of indentured labourers to work the British and Australian owned sugarcane fields. Most of these labourers were illiterate or semi-literate. They wanted to provide their children education but the colonial administration was content with opening schools for the children of the European settlers in the main cities like Suva and Lautoka, with separate schools for the indigenous Fijians in the rural areas, but none for the Indian children.

The far-sighted indentured labourers looked to social organisations in their motherland for qualified teachers and opened a string of schools even in remote areas so that none of their children remained illiterate for want of a school. These schools were not exclusive and open to anyone wanting to educate his or her children. Over the years these schools gained so much in popularity because of quality education that in many places, particularly in the larger towns, there are more Fijian than Indian students. The Fiji government acknowledges the Indian Diaspora's contribution in education.

Before Fiji became independent many of the Fiji-Indian parents used to send their children to India for higher education as the admission policy of the University of South Pacific in Suva, established during the closing days of colonial rule, was heavily weighted in favour of indigenous Fijians. Setting much lower qualifying marks for indigenous Fijian students for admission to USP, he stated, is not only self-defeating but has acquired a racial dimension. Fiji-Indian academics settled comfortably in Australian and New Zealand universities have come back to Fiji in the last few years and established a new university in Lautoka free of any racial bias.

The Indian Diaspora in Fiji, Mr Rajappa concluded, can be proud of their contribution to education and enriching their adopted country.

**Professor Richard Bedford**  
**University of Waikato**  
**Summary**

Professor Bedford's speech highlighted the challenge for Forum delegates to provide insights into dimensions of diaspora that might inform the forthcoming Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Kuala Lumpur in June 2009. Professor Bedford commented that the Commonwealth has long had an 'education agenda' that includes the prestigious Commonwealth Scholarship programme, a programme that has supported some of the best minds to study for Masters and Doctoral degrees overseas. It has also supported major regional co-operation ventures, such as the Colombo Plan which was launched in July 1951 by seven nations: Australia, Canada, Ceylon, Great Britain, India, New Zealand and Pakistan.

Professor Bedford said that it is important to recall the strong commitment the Commonwealth has had to strengthening and developing education in the Asia-Pacific region. He stated that one outcome of this commitment has been the development of an 'education diaspora'. He noted that movements of students overseas for education, especially from countries in Asia in recent years, have been attracting increasing attention from policy makers and civil society NGOs. Professor Bedford said that the Commonwealth has deliberately fostered movement to take advantage of opportunities for education, and this movement has contributed to the development of a major export education industry in many countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. Professor Bedford pointed out, however, that the flows have become more complex – not just to OECD countries but also to new hubs of tertiary education in Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Philippines and China.

In conclusion, Professor Bedford posed two questions. Firstly, whether the competition for international students from Asia is working in the interests of Asian societies and economies? Secondly, whether the offer of opportunities to transition from study permits to residence in the receiving country is a positive initiative as far as the international students are concerned?

Professor Bedford said that the two questions challenge the assumption that such movements necessarily produce win-win-win outcomes. He pointed out that this is especially evident if the sending country is very short of the skills that are being lost, or if the individuals find discrimination in the labour market in their new homes means they cannot get work that matches their qualifications and skills. Professor Bedford emphasised the need to assess more comprehensively the costs and benefits of the education diaspora.

**Professor Stephanie Fahey**

## **Monash University Summary**

Professor Fahey defined the term education diaspora as referring to students and their families who have moved between countries for educational purposes and have remained in the host country but have maintained links with their home country. Professor Fahey said the tendency for people to stay in the host country is increasing with the global ‘war on talent’ and as Australia is short of highly skilled people, immigration laws have changed to encourage those who come to Australia to stay. Professor Fahey also highlighted the intensity of communication between the current diasporas and their home countries. This has been made possible, she said, through changes in technology. Students are using Skype, Facebook, email communication with their friends and families and the distance between Malaysia and Australia is now very short.

Professor Fahey noted that there is also a change in the pattern of global education. Traditionally, she said, students came from around the region for education in Australia, New Zealand and the USA, but that pattern is changing and added that Malaysia and Singapore are becoming major hubs for education in the region.

Professor Fahey discussed the historical ties that Monash University has maintained with Malaysia, commencing with the Colombo Plan in the 1950s. Professor Fahey emphasised Monash University’s stated values on access and diversity which went against popular thinking of the time. She said that the establishment of Monash in Malaysia is intended to genuinely engage in the region, to have a truly international campus that is not geographically bound to Australian, and to build a relationship that cannot be built on trade alone or on the cult of short-termism. Professor Fahey noted that Monash University Sunway Campus supports Malaysia’s aspirations; it contributes to reducing the brain drain, engages with the wider Malaysian community and produces future generation of leaders.

## **Session Four – Realising people’s potential: Inclusion, opportunity and social capital**

**Chair: Professor James Chin  
Monash Malaysia**

## **Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta Calcutta University Summary**

Professor Dasgupta opened her presentation with information on the flows of Indian migration prior to 1947 and cited a piece from the Tagore Nationalism which stated that “the history of India does not belong to one particular race but to a process of creation to which various races of the world contributed.” Professor Dasgupta cited

Nehru's reflections of his own identity: "I have become a queer mixture of the East and West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere," and Edward Said's interpretation of connectivity: "I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance." Amartya Sen's revealing and poignant description of identity and inclusion summarised Professor Dasgupta's presentation of diversity and the story of individuals in a changing global environment: "I can be at the same time an Asian, an Indian citizen, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry, an American or British resident, an economist, a dabbler in philosophy, an author, a Sanskritist, a strong believer in secularism and democracy, a man, a feminist, a heterosexual, a defender of gay and lesbian rights, with a nonreligious lifestyle, from a Hindu background, a non-Brahmin and a non-believer in after life." Professor Dasgupta asserted that the strong cultural contributions of diasporas, for example in Commonwealth literature, and cultural connections between diaspora communities and countries they identify with, need to be given more attention.

**Ms Bala Thakrar**  
**Asian Foundation for Philanthropy**  
**Summary**

Ms Thakrar's presentation focussed on diasporic communities in the United Kingdom as she discussed the advantages and challenges for the host country and the diaspora value for the home country. She began with a general definition of diaspora as a population of migrant origin who are scattered among two or more destinations. Ms Thakrar said that currently, more than in the past, diasporas are made up from mixes of people who arrived at different times, through different channels and through different means. She highlighted that currently the UK diaspora community make up 10% of the population and 4% come from South Asian countries which accounts for 10% of UK's economic output. Ms Thakrar pointed to the opportunities and advantages of the UK diasporic communities in the economic, political, cultural and social life of the UK. In business, diasporas are a driving force in small and medium enterprise with 250,000 ethnic minority enterprises contributing 13 billion pounds a year to the British economy. Politically, diasporas are valued as a source of information and as participants in the political system. Ms Thakrar highlighted the need for governments to increase engagement and conversation with the diaspora to realise their potential in development, poverty reduction and peace building. In light of recent global events, Ms Thakrar commented that the debate on terrorism has raised awareness of the connections between international and domestic events and the role of diasporas is seen as influential. Ms Thakrar said that culturally and socially diasporas offer diversity in the arts which plays an important role in bridging gaps and promoting tolerance between diasporas and the host country. Ms Thakrar acknowledged the complex and often contradictory nature of diasporas and said that governments must be proactive in understanding what it means to be part of a diasporic community, how migration occurred, the interaction with diaspora and between different groups and how people can be supported to participate fully in the host community. She said that there is much to be gained from understanding and engaging with the diasporas and assisting people to realise their full potential. Ms Thakrar concluded by highlighting further economic and social benefits of the diaspora for both the host and home countries and ended with a quote from Jimmy

Carter: “We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.”

**Dr Lim Teck Ghee**  
**University College Sedaya International, Malaysia**  
**Summary**

Dr Ghee’s presentation examined what happens when communities are excluded, mismanaged or misunderstood in the host country. He said that excluded diasporas in the Commonwealth need to be part of the discourse and presented a case study of marginalised Indians in Malaysia. Dr Ghee gave an historical/social snapshot of the Indian community in Malaysia, saying that the empirical data on the well-being of Indians in Malaysia is muddled by a lack of transparency and disclosure. Dr Ghee discussed the Hindu Rights Action Force which formed in 2005 and articulated various issues affecting the Indian Malaysian community such as neglect and marginalisation, unresponsiveness of the political system, and the blocked avenues of communication and expression. Dr Ghee discussed the stumbling blocks to integrating diasporas, which include a narrow nation building perspective and state policies based on differentiating between immigrants and Malays. He talked about the lessons to be learnt from the Hindu Rights Action Force, such as a need for policy formulation based on independent and neutral analysis of empirical data; need for participation, transparency and accountability in public policy implementation; the need for free and independent media; and the need for higher standards of governance and greater tolerance of dissent. He added that findings from the World Bank/IDA showed that resilient and competitive economies were marked by high social cohesion and low conflict; inclusion of all social groups; access and equality of opportunity; rule of law; vibrant democratic institutions; and neutral and race blind bureaucracies and open societies. Dr Ghee concluded his presentation by commenting on ways to avoid conflicts which involve learning from past lessons but not being imprisoned by past paradigms. He added that social rights should not be delayed or reduced because of perceived economic disparities and that there is a need to match rhetoric with action in practising tolerance and fairness as a prerequisite to the development of a modern, pluralistic society.

## **Breakout Session Three – Education diasporas**

**Chair: Professor Stephanie Fahey**  
**Monash University**

### **Recommendations**

1. The Commonwealth should develop a code of conduct to take concerns highlighted above into account. The code of conduct could be based on the Bologna Accord on EU higher education reform. The code of conduct should include principles of access and equity for all citizens;

2. The Commonwealth should revisit the scholarships program. It needs to be regenerated and promoted. Student mobility should be encouraged throughout the Commonwealth through scholarships;
3. The Commonwealth should encourage the exchange of courseware between countries, particularly those countries who have developed courseware to share with under developed countries;
4. Commonwealth countries should look at ways of increasing the mobility of people to work in universities overseas, through, for example, examining prohibitive tax laws;
5. The Commonwealth should promote voluntary service overseas, for example retired professors;
6. The Commonwealth should support linking of schools across the commonwealth;
7. The Commonwealth should promote recognition of the new hubs of education in Asia, for example, Indian achievements.

## **Breakout Session Four – Realising people’s potential: Inclusion, opportunity and social capital**

**Chair: Ms Bala Thakrar**  
**Asian Foundation for Philanthropy**

### **Recommendations**

1. Society in host countries should be stimulated to recognize and celebrate successes, and the benefits of having immigrants.
2. Equal opportunity for all people should be realised;
3. Policy should be guided by research and rational analysis;
4. The important role of the media should be recognized, and support should be given for media regulation and sensitization.
5. NGOs should be partnered with as a bridge between diasporic groups and mainstream groups, such as employers.

## **Session Five – Diasporas – Where to next?**

**Chair: Dr Mark Collins**  
**Commonwealth Foundation**

Dr Collins proposed the following issues for consideration: (1) that a new definition of diaspora be identified with the understanding that voluntary identity is intrinsic to

contemporary diaspora; (2) that research continue to explore the impact of diasporas on economies, societies and structure, culture, development, and communications; (3) that media be educated on diasporas to bring this awareness forward; (4) that education systems provide the opportunity and curriculum to recognise diasporas; (5) that health issues related with diasporas be explored; (6) that policy development protect and respect fundamental rights. Dr Collins added that it is the responsibility of civil society to undertake political advocacy to promote these issues. In response to civil society calls, the Commonwealth Foundation would try to help civil society to bring diaspora issues forward in other arenas.

**Mr Ravindra Kumar**  
**The Statesman**  
**Summary**

Mr Kumar suggested the notion of the ‘brain drain’ is outdated. He stated that individuals cannot be expected not to embrace a better lifestyle unless conditions exist in countries of origin where they might thrive and want to come back to. He suggested that quality of life is something which brings people back. Mr Kumar continued his argument by saying that we need to consider ‘best practice’ and cited India as being one of the largest recipient of migrants in the last three decades. He said that except for one political party, which has had migration on their agenda, migration has not been an issue in Indian politics. Mr Kumar suggested that perhaps there is a need for a Commonwealth-wide standard on education. Mr Kumar concluded by acknowledging that the conference has inspired all delegates to think more broadly about the myriad issues surrounding diaspora. In his closing comments, Mr Kumar provided an analogy of diaspora, saying that if ‘diaspora’ were a plane with two engines, one would be ‘hope’ and the other would be ‘despair’.

**Mr Andrew Firmin**  
**Commonwealth Foundation**  
**Summary**

Mr Firmin suggested that, for the Commonwealth, exploration of diasporas signaled a departure from using the nation state as the main area of focus to looking both internally at what happens within national borders and externally at complex connections across borders. He said that much of what the Commonwealth has done to date has been about linking countries but it has often been blind to the nuances and complexities within those countries, wanting to treat everybody in the same manner. Mr Firmin argued that engaging with diversity within member countries calls for some changes of practice. For example, it may call for more analysis of context in intervention, in program design; it may call for an audit of impact of interventions on minorities and on diasporas. Mr Firmin acknowledged that the Commonwealth is still coming to grips with the definition ‘diaspora’ and felt that new definitions and descriptions may need to be invented. He believed that part of the problem with the definition at present is that it includes communities that are fairly static, fixed and

long-term, while at the same time there is a new reality of mobility, rapidly shifting identities and locations and belongings.

**Professor Kee Pookong**  
**Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University**  
**Summary**

Professor Pookong acknowledged that there is a need for more research on how we understand different diaspora subgroups and on cities as ‘knots’ of diaspora. He added that research needs to explore issues such as the active construction of roles and identities. Professor Pookong said that there is also lack statistics and that the British Library could work on this issue. In closing Professor Pookong emphasised that there is an ongoing moral responsibility of Britain to the issues of diaspora.

**Professor Graeme Hugo**  
**University of Adelaide**  
**Summary**

Professor Hugo commented that the Commonwealth offers a forum not often seen on the world arena where issues of development can be explored. Professor Hugo added that the Commonwealth could potentially lead the world in terms of creating findings and solutions which can bring a ‘triple-win’ for migrants, their countries of origins and their new countries.

**Ms Bala Thakrar**  
**Asian Foundation for Philanthropy**  
**Summary**

Ms Thakrar highlighted the importance of having a political framework in place in order to optimise outcomes. Ms Thakrar stated that it was imperative to stay clear on what is meant by diaspora and develop meaningful links between academia and NGOs.

# Summary and Acknowledgements

## **Dr Bulent (Hass) Dellal OAM Australian Multicultural Foundation Summary**

Dr Dellal acknowledged the positive work the Commonwealth has done and what it can still do in terms of progressing diversity within its member countries. He described the growing awareness and participation of the Commonwealth over the past ten years and said that although the Diversity Matters Forums may appear ‘small’ they have made significant impact. Dr Dellal cited two examples of forum outcomes; the first involved putting a multicultural agenda on the Commonwealth agenda; and the second involved the development of a report examining the Commonwealth, faith and the role of religious leaders in promoting social cohesion. Dr Dellal emphasised that the Diversity Matters Forums have made a difference in progressing understanding and developing practical community outcomes.

Dr Dellal reinforced the comments made by Mark Collins and noted that the recommendation presented by Howard Duncan summarised what the Commonwealth can and does do: “The Commonwealth Foundation can facilitate the creation of safe public discussion of diversity and safe public spaces wherein members of different groups can meet, raise awareness, acknowledge and negotiate difference and ultimately develop high degrees of mutual trust.” Dr Dellal suggested that this environment allows members to openly discuss and develop strategies, programs and interventions at the community level. He said that this was evidenced in the discussions and recommendations that arose from the current Diversity Matters Forum and cited the issue regarding the definition of ‘diaspora’ in a contemporary setting which encompasses second and third generations and the use of NGOs to demonstrate practical diversity activities.

Dr Dellal said that a report on the Diversity Matters Forum will be distributed to delegates for their comments and input and that these will help compile the final report which will be presented to the Commonwealth Foundation. Dr Dellal remarked that the Australian Multicultural Foundation initiated the Diversity Matters Forums ten years ago with the now defunct Commonwealth Institute. He said that the ongoing partnership with the Statesman, the Commonwealth Foundation and, over the past three forums, with Monash University, has resulted in producing excellent outcomes. Dr Dellal thanked these partners and, in particular, Dr Mark Collins, Mr Andrew Firmin, Professor John Nieuwenhuysen, Ms Sahar Sana, Ms Irene Thavarajah and her team, Mr Ravindra Kumar, Prof James Chin and his staff, Dr Michael Yeoh, Ms Kate Latimer and Ms Stine Neerup for their commitment and passion. In conclusion, Dr Dellal thanked all delegates for their excellent contributions and input and invited Professor Nieuwenhuysen to say a few words.

**Professor John Nieuwenhuysen**  
**Monash University**  
**Summary**

Professor Nieuwenhuysen highlighted the excellence of the previous Diversity Matters Forums and the equally high quality of this last forum. He said that this forum had the added glory of having a truly magnificent opening speech by the Crown Prince. Professor Nieuwenhuysen applauded the Crown Prince's speech saying that he has seldom, if ever, heard such a marvellous compression of the great literature within the scope of 25 minutes. He said that the opening speech initiated an inspiration among the members and participants of this conference.

Professor Nieuwenhuysen said there were two issues of particular importance that became manifest during the conference. The first was the issue of inclusion among diasporas. The second issue was that of immigration. He said that the growing deep economic recession will make the importance of the subject of diasporas and their role and place in society even more important than in the past. Professor Nieuwenhuysen commented that this has been a relevant conference. He was pleased to announce Monash University's full coverage in the next edition of "Around the Globe" of the 5<sup>th</sup> Diversity Matters Forum.

Professor Nieuwenhuysen thanked the partners of the Forum, the Commonwealth Foundation with Mark Collins and Andrew Firmin, the Australian Multicultural Foundation with Hass Dellal and, in particular, Sir James Gobbo for coming and so fully participating in the conference and bringing Lady Gobbo with him. He thanked Sir Gobbo for the very fine manner in which he chaired the Crown Prince and struck up an immediate rapport with him. Professor Nieuwenhuysen thanked Ravindra Kumar for his constant support and publicity prior to the conference in the Statesman and the magazines associated with it. Professor Nieuwenhuysen mentioned Dr Michael Yeoh the head of ASLI, who unfortunately could not attend but whose organisation had played a part in putting conference together. Professor Nieuwenhuysen extended his gratitude to Monash Malaysia and staff who accomplished a wonderful job in facilitating the forum. In particular, thanks went out to Professor James Chin and other members of Monash Malaysia. Professor Nieuwenhuysen acknowledged the great work of his own team and the participation of Monash University Vice-Chancellor Professor Stephanie Fahey. The contributions of all the speakers were acknowledged and appreciated. Finally, Professor Nieuwenhuysen thanked Hass Dellal the instigator of the Diversity Forums and Monash University which has been an involved partner over the past three forums.

# Appendix 1 Program of the Forum

## Day 1 - 19 November 2008

- 10:00 – 10:30am    Registration  
Master of Ceremonies – Benjamin Mc Kay,  
Sunway Campus Monash University,
- 10:30 – 10:35am    **Introduction**  
Dr Bulent (Hass) Dellal OAM  
Australian Multicultural Foundation
- Words of Welcome to Monash Malaysia**  
Professor James Chin  
Monash Malaysia
- 10:35 – 11:00am    **Keynote address**  
  
His Royal Highness Raja Dr Nazrin Shah  
Crown Prince of Perak Darul Ridzuan  
  
Chair: Sir James Gobbo AC CVO  
Australian Multicultural Foundation
- 11:00 – 11:30am    Morning Tea
- 11:30 – 12:00pm    **Opening Comments**  
  
Sir James Gobbo  
Australian Multicultural Foundation  
  
Ravindra Kumar  
The Statesman  
  
Dr Mark Collins  
Commonwealth Foundation
- 12:00 – 1:00pm    **Session 1 - General Perspectives and Overview**  
  
Professor Graeme Hugo

University of Adelaide

Professor Kee Pookong  
Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

Chair: Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz (TBC)  
Bank Negara Malaysia

1:00 – 2:00pm

Lunch

2:00 – 3:30pm

**Session 2 - Social Cohesion and Inclusion**  
Engaging with Faith, Identity and Integration

Dr Howard Duncan  
Metropolis Project

Rev Dr Hermen Shastri  
Council of Churches of Malaysia

Dr Kris Rampersad  
Communications and Literary Consultant, Trinidad and  
Tabago

Jerald Joseph  
Pusat Komus, Malaysia

Chair: Dr Helen Nesadurai  
Monash Malaysia

3:30 – 4:00pm

Afternoon Tea

4:00 – 5:30pm

**Breakout sessions**  
based on sessions 1 and 2

Session 1 Chair Sam Rajappa, The Statesman  
Session 2 Chair Howard Duncan, Metropolis Project

7:00pm

Dinner  
Guest Host – HE Penny Williams, Australian High  
Commissioner  
Venue – Sunway Resort Hotel

## **Day 2 - 20 November 2008**

9.00am – 10:30am **Session 3 - Education Diasporas**

Sam Rajappa  
Journalist, The Statesman

Professor Richard Bedford  
University of Waikato

Professor Stephanie Fahey  
Monash University

Chair: Associate Professor Dr Ong Puay Liu  
Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), University Kebangsaan  
Malaysia

10.30 – 11:00am Morning Tea

11:00 – 12:30pm **Session 4 - Realising People's Potential**  
Inclusion, opportunity and social capital

Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta  
Calcutta University

Bala Thakrar  
Asian Foundation for Philanthropy

Dr Lim Teck Ghee  
University College Sedaya International, Malaysia

Chair: Professor James Chin  
Monash Malaysia

12:30 – 1.30pm Lunch

1.30 – 3:00pm **Breakout Sessions**  
Based on sessions 3 and 4

Session 3 Chair Stephanie Fahey, Monash University  
Session 4 Chair Bala Thakrar, Asian Foundation for  
Philanthropy

3:00 – 3.30pm Afternoon Tea

3.30 – 5:00pm

**Session 5 - Diasporas – Where to next?**

Ravindra Kumar  
The Statesman

Andrew Firmin  
Commonwealth Foundation

Professor Kee Pookong  
Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

Practical Outcomes

Dr Bulent (Hass) Dellal OAM  
Australian Multicultural Foundation

Chair: Dr Mark Collins  
Commonwealth Foundation

5:00pm

**Conference Close**

Professor John Nieuwenhuysen AM  
Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movement

**Day 3 - 21 November 2008**

Tours (optional)

## Appendix 2 List of Participants

Karthil	Ashok	Malaysia
Rasul	Badar	Malaysia
	Balambigai	University of Malaysia/University of Adelaide
Richard	Bedford	New Zealand
Lynn	Cain	Australia
Susan	Cheah	Malaysia
Cheong	Poh Wah	Malaysia
Desmond	Chin	Malaysia
James	Chin	Malaysia
Doria	Chin	Malaysia
Carole	Chung	Malaysia
Mark	Collins	United Kingdom
Lorraine	Curtis	Australia
David	Dass	Malaysia
Sanjukta	Dasgupta	India
Hass	Dellal	Australia
Graham	Down	Monash College
Howard	Duncan	Canada
Ron	Edwards	Malaysia
Julie	Edwards	Malaysia
Stephanie	Fahey	Australia
Andrew	Firmin	United Kingdom
Foo	Yee Boon	Malaysia
Sir James	Gobbo	Australia
Lady	Gobbo	Australia
Gavin	Gomez	Malaysia
Razman M	Hashim	Malaysia
Zakir Hossain	Raju	Malaysia
Graeme	Hugo	Australia
Shahril Eashak	Ismail	Malaysia
K.J.	John	Malaysia
Jerald	Joseph	Malaysia
Pookong	Kee	Japan
Ravindra	Kumar	India
P.M.	Lal	Malaysia
Dato Hamzah	Lassim	Malaysia
Kate	Latimer	Australia
Jason	Leong	Malaysia
Lee Yu	Ban	Malaysia
Lim	Teck Ghee	Malaysia
Liew Wei	Ling	Malaysia
Benjamin	McKay	Malaysia
Tan Sri Ramon	Navaratnam	Malaysia
Stine	Neerup	Australia
Helen E.S.	Nesadurai	Malaysia
John	Nieuwenhuysen	Australia
Cynthia	Ng	Malaysia
Ong	Puay Liu	Malaysia

Jill	Ooi	Malaysia
	Phang	Malaysia
Sharon	Phoon	Malaysia
Ong	Puay Liu	Malaysia
Sam	Rajappa	India
Zakir Hossain	Raju	Malaysia
Kris	Rampersad	Trinidad and Tobago
Sahar	Sana	Australia
N.K.	Saxena	Malaysia
	Schubert	
Paddy	Sdn.Bhd	Malaysia
HRH Raja Dr Jazrin	Shah	Malaysia
Herman	Shastri	Malaysia
	Shyamala	Malaysia
Parveen	Sidhu	Malaysia
Jasbir	Singh	Malaysia
Ganeson	Sivagurunathan	Malaysia
Selvarajoo	Sundram	Malaysia
Tan	Chong Chowg	Malaysia
Tan	Swee Ho	Malaysia
Bala	Thakrar	United Kingdom
Irene	Thavarajah	Australia
Penny	Williams	Malaysia
Michael	Yeoh	Malaysia
Kim	Yoke Eng	Malaysia
Thaera	Yousef	Malaysia