

## **Conference Concept note:**

# **Diasporas in Action: Working together for peace, development and humanitarian response**

For the first time in Australia, a conference focussing on the innovation and growing impact of diaspora communities in the global humanitarian, peace and development effort will be held in September 2016. *Diasporas in Action: Working together for peace, development and humanitarian response* is the premier forum to explore and enhance the power of diasporas in Australia and the region, attracting key leaders and influencers in the humanitarian network. The program will include speakers and participants from Australian and international diaspora organisations, government, policy makers and some of the world's most experienced NGOs.

### **Why diasporas?**

In recent years, diaspora organisations have become increasingly visible players on the global stage, involved in projects ranging from peacebuilding, advocacy, humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction projects. Australian diaspora groups have successfully built schools in villages and increased the percentage of female students; improved local economies through job creation; and promoted respect for human rights. They do all this armed with local knowledge—and often on shoestring budgets.

While European and North American aid and development sectors have been engaging with such groups for the past decade, their Australian counterparts are only now beginning to be recognised for their significant contributions. The *Diasporas in Action* conference will bring together scholars, development and humanitarian NGOs, government representatives, diaspora practitioners and Australian society in general to enhance dialogue and understanding of the role of diasporas in development, peacebuilding and humanitarian response. Such a conference—both in topic and scope—has never before been held in this country.

### **Diasporas in Australia**

Australia is home to large and varied diaspora populations, with a quarter of the population born outside of Australia and 49% of the population with a parent born overseas<sup>1</sup>. Australia's overseas-born populations come predominantly from the Asia Pacific region and Europe, but with sizeable Middle Eastern and African communities. It is clear that diaspora activity in this country mirrors international trends, with a plethora of diaspora-led organisations dedicated to health, education, livelihoods, child protection, peace building and reconciliation.

However, the full potential of diaspora organisations is only beginning to be systematically explored in Australia. Insufficient understanding of the nature and impact of diaspora-led

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. Census 2011. <http://www.abs.gov.au/census>

development and humanitarian response – its strengths, challenges and potential – is a contributing factor to the slow responses of government and development agencies in recognising the work that these organisations do and the value and expertise that could be accessed through engaging with them.

The *Diasporas in Action* conference will provide a unique opportunity for researchers, practitioners, students, policy makers, and the broader civil society to share insights, good practice and lessons learned. This discussion promises to benefit the Australian development and humanitarian response and contribute to an international dialogue through the experiences of diasporas based in Australia and the region.

## What will this conference achieve?

The purpose of this two-day conference is to support greater collaboration and enhance debates between researchers, practitioners and the broader civil society about the role of Australian diaspora communities in peace-building, development and humanitarian response. It will:

- Showcase emerging research on the roles of diaspora communities in peace, development and humanitarian response.
- Provide a space for members of diaspora communities to articulate their views on how they can engage with other peace-building, development and humanitarian actors.
- Contribute to the innovation of development and humanitarian policy and practice in Australia by providing a forum for exploring issues and debates on the role of diaspora communities in peace-building, development and humanitarian response.
- Contribute to greater linkages between diaspora and other development and humanitarian actors in Australia, hence laying the ground for future collaboration.
- Build linkages to global discussions amongst diaspora communities and humanitarian and development actors on the role of diaspora communities in peace-building, development and humanitarian response.

The intention of the Diaspora Learning Network is to continue after the conference to build on these outcomes and to further understanding of the role of diasporas in peace, development and humanitarian action.

## Conference streams and guiding questions

### 1. Diasporas in human development

This stream will explore human development in areas such as health, education, livelihoods, etc

Questions: How do diaspora communities contribute to development in their countries of origin? What are the opportunities for linkages and partnerships between diasporas, the

states in their origin countries, and traditional development NGOs?

## **2. Diasporas, conflict resolution and peace building**

This stream will focus on the unique position occupied by diasporas in peace building and conflict resolution, given that many political and community leaders have often been forced into exile.

Questions: How do diasporas define peace and justice? How do they contribute to peace and conflict resolution at all levels, from grassroots peacebuilding, conflict prevention and participation in peace processes, to State building and governance?

## **3. Diasporas, humanitarian issues and response**

This stream will look at diaspora engagement in humanitarian responses, from emergency relief efforts, to responding to the needs of those living in protracted refugee situations in countries of asylum, and to others that are forcibly displaced.

Questions: How do diasporas respond in humanitarian crises such as forced displacement (refugee flows and internal displacement; climate-induced displacement), natural disasters and health emergencies? How do they access vulnerable populations? How do they intersect with traditional humanitarian actors?

## **4. Diasporas and economic development**

This stream will explore diaspora contributions to economic development in areas such as infrastructure, labour migration, job creation, investment, business development and remittances.

Questions: How does diaspora activity contribute to economic development and trade in their countries of origin and residence? What are the opportunities for linkages and partnerships between diasporas and the private sector in both country of origin and residence?

## **5. Diasporas and human rights**

This stream addresses diaspora-led human rights promotion and advocacy, from countries of residence and/or through transnational networks.

How do diasporas build human rights campaigns to raise awareness of the issues and advocate for a respect for human rights? How do they link with other human rights organisations, institutions, and mechanisms within the UN human rights system or the International Criminal Court? What are the challenges faced by diasporas engaging in this work?

## **6. Diasporas and settlement in host countries**

This stream will explore diasporas as change agents in countries of residence, supporting both those who are new to Australia but also providing a bridge for those seeking to migrate.

Questions: How do diaspora leverage transnational linkages and understandings of countries of origin, transit and residence to build communities, provide migration/asylum advice, assist in settlement of new arrivals, build community harmony, address radicalisation, and forge new identities?

## Keynote speakers

The following international speakers have been confirmed:

- International Organization of Migration (IOM), Geneva
- Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie – Director, Up!-Africa Ltd

## Call for papers

A call for papers will be issued in April 2016.

## Conference format

The Conference will highlight emerging research and practice, critically examine new and innovative ideas, and create spaces for cross-sectoral engagement and partnership, through:

- Plenary presentations;
- Panel presentations and discussion;
- Workshops;
- Side events.

## Target audience

The conference size is anticipated to be 150-200 participants, primarily from the following stakeholder groups:

- Australian and international development/humanitarian practitioners and policy makers
- Diaspora communities and organisations
- Researchers
- Students

## Organising partners

This conference is convened by the Diaspora Learning Network, an initiative of Diaspora Action Australia and The University of Melbourne, in partnership with the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), The Australian Red Cross, Oxfam Australia, Afghan Australian Relief and Development Organisation and Hazara Women of Australia.

## Sponsorship

The conference organisers are seeking expressions of interest from organisations who wish to sponsor the 2016 Conference. For further information on sponsorship options please contact Denise

Cauchi conference@diasporaaction.org.au.

### **Location and timing**

The conference will be held at the University of Melbourne on 26-27 September 2016.

### **For more information**

Contact: conference@diasporaaction.org.au

## Background resources related to the conference theme

### Recent seminars and conferences

18-19 June 2013: IOM Diaspora Ministerial Conference “Diasporas and Development: Bridging Societies and States” <http://www.iom.int/cms/idmdmc>

25 Jun 2014: Side Event to the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment. Organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) The Role of Diaspora during and after Crisis Situations. <http://webtv.un.org/watch/the-role-of-diaspora-during-and-after-crisis-situations/3642043201001>

17 March 2014: European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Danish Refugee Council and Maastricht University. Pubic Seminar “Refugee diasporas as development actors”

3 June 2015: IOM. “Diaspora Engagement in humanitarian response” <http://webtv.un.org/search/part-1-the-role-of-diaspora-in-humanitarian-response-migration-series/4273950903001?term=diaspora>

20 November 2015: DiaGram conference. “Opportunities and Challenges of Diaspora Engagement – Lessons learned from diaspora support Programmes”.

### Selected research

De Haas, H. (2006), “Engaging Diasporas: How governments and development agencies can support diaspora involvement in the development of origin countries” International Migration Institute, University of Oxford

Horst, C. (2013), “The Depoliticisation of Diasporas from the Horn of Africa: From Refugees to Transnational Aid Workers”, *African Studies*, 72:2, 228-245,

Ionescu, D. (2006), “Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners for Home and Destination Countries: Challenges for Policymakers”. International Organisation for Migration. *Migration Research Series No 26*. Available at: [http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published\\_docs/serial\\_publications/MRS26.pdf](http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/serial_publications/MRS26.pdf)

Judge, R. and De Plaen, R. (2011), “Courting the diaspora: Emerging roles of diaspora groups in the international development industry.” *Policy briefing paper 27*, International NGO Training and Research Centre. Available at <http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/707/Briefing-Paper-27-Courting-the-Diaspora.pdf>

Osman, S. “Learning from diaspora experiences in peacebuilding”, African Diaspora Policy Centre. Available at [http://www.diaspora-centre.org/DOCS/FINAL\\_DIASPEACE.pdf](http://www.diaspora-centre.org/DOCS/FINAL_DIASPEACE.pdf)

Sinatti, G. (2010), “Key criteria of ‘good practice’ for constructive diaspora engagement in Peacebuilding”. Discussion Paper. African Diaspora Policy Centre. Available at [http://www.diaspora-centre.org/DOCS/ADPC\\_Paper\\_June201.pdf](http://www.diaspora-centre.org/DOCS/ADPC_Paper_June201.pdf)

Sinatti, G, and Horst, C. (2014), “Migrants as agents of Development”. *Ethnicities*

Slim, H. (2013), “NGOs and the Future: a think piece”. Available at <http://www.acfid.asn.au/learning-development/files/ngos-and-the-future-a-think-piece>

Smith, H. and Stares, P. (eds) (2007), *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or Peace-wreckers?* United

Nations University Press, New York.

Svoboda, E. and Pantuliano, S. (2015), "International and local/diaspora actors in the Syria response". Humanitarian Policy Group. Available at: [http://www.odi.org/publications/8714-international-localdiaspora-actors-syria-response?utm\\_source=HPG+Updates&utm\\_campaign=0cc92caba8-HPG+Quarterly+Update+Dec+13+-+March+14&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_8b4e4b3907-0cc92caba8-76450433](http://www.odi.org/publications/8714-international-localdiaspora-actors-syria-response?utm_source=HPG+Updates&utm_campaign=0cc92caba8-HPG+Quarterly+Update+Dec+13+-+March+14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8b4e4b3907-0cc92caba8-76450433)