

**Dr Richard Grant
Executive director, Asia New Zealand Foundation
Intersections: Southeast Asia and Diaspora Engagement
Report launch speech notes
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Thank you for this opportunity to welcome all of you to the launch of the Asia New Zealand Foundation's latest Outlook report.

I hope the report – Intersections: Southeast Asia and Diaspora Engagement – is of interest to the distinguished group that I see before me.

I'd like to acknowledge the support of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the New Zealand High Commission for their assistance in launching the Intersections report here in Singapore.

Although it deals specifically with New Zealand's engagement with Southeast Asia, I hope you will also see lessons in this excellent study that apply to other countries beyond the rim of ASEAN.

If you're not aware of the Asian New Zealand Foundation, let me just begin by telling you that we are a non-profit, non-political organization dedicated to building New Zealanders' knowledge and understanding of Asia.

We do this through our different programme areas – culture, education, media, business and research.

The Outlook series of reports – the latest of which is the Intersections report which is being released today- are an important component of the foundation's research programme.

One of the key tasks of the research programme is to identify gaps in public and academic discourse about Asians in New Zealand and conversely, New Zealand in Asia.

Where gaps in knowledge are identified, the foundation commissions experts from within NZ and around the Asia Pacific region to write studies on the relevant issues that emerge to create more light and less heat.

We do this to counter ignorance in the public arena that may exist around issues such as immigration from Asian nations and Asian communities in New Zealand.

We also do this to increase New Zealanders awareness of Asia and the region's growing importance to our country.

Tolerance and increased understanding of the Asian diaspora communities in New Zealand is an important feature of this work.

Recently the Asia New Zealand Foundation published a five-part series on New Zealand's Asian populations in its major cities, based on the 2006 census results.

Census is carried out every four years and the 2006 figures are our most recent.

These reports are the first of their kind and as a result the research we undertake is covered significantly in the New Zealand news media and that includes our annual survey of New Zealanders perceptions of Asia.

The Intersections report being launched today, written by demographer Robert Didham, is part of a series of papers looking at New Zealanders in Asia.

But as the author noted, looking at one side of the diaspora presents an incomplete picture if the reverse diaspora is not included in any study on diaspora – something which Robert Didham has done to very informative effect as you'll see if you read the report.

Forthcoming papers in this series include one on New Zealanders in China and another on New Zealanders in South Asia.

These papers will be the first published research from New Zealand on this topic and will inform what is becoming a very important part of New Zealand's engagement with the Asian region.

They contribute to the foundation's theme of this year being the Year of The Diaspora.

Other upcoming papers that will be published over the next two years include a series looking at New Zealand's place in Asia from the perspective of five different authors from throughout the Asia Pacific region.

The research and policy programme that the foundation has – as well as its other programme areas of education, culture, media and business – not only commissions research but leads New Zealand's Track II engagement with Asian partner organizations.

In the Track II sphere, the Asia New Zealand Foundation frequently leads high-level delegations in bilateral and multilateral dialogues in Asia.

The foundation's register of NZ-based track two experts is the most comprehensive register of its kind in NZ and our links with other track two organizations through Asia are wide and deep.

It is through Track II, that our partnership and friendship with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies has evolved.

It is a relationship that we at the foundation value very highly and I want to pay tribute to the enormous reservoir of goodwill that exists between our two organizations.

Returning to today's report – Intersections: Southeast Asia and Diaspora Engagement – I would like to stress that the increasing

number of New Zealanders living and working in Southeast Asia and conversely, Southeast Asian communities that have settled in New Zealand mark a growing impetus for closer links with Southeast Asia.

The Intersections report says given the importance of the emerging Free Trade Agreement involving New Zealand and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), along with China and Australia, these diasporas are set to become important players in this transnational future.

The report looks at the connections between the two diasporas and examines ways in which they engage with each other and with their respective host societies.

According to the 2006 Census, there were 44,000 people of Southeast Asian ethnicities living in New Zealand but that number swells to 60,000 if people born in South East Asia of Indian and Chinese ethnicities are included.

Contrastingly a rough estimate of New Zealanders in Southeast Asia is possibly 8,000 to 12,000.

The report says while the number of New Zealanders in Southeast Asian countries is proportionally much smaller than the Southeast Asian diaspora in New Zealand, a sum of the two diasporas does present enormous advantages in our policy making efforts to build strong sustained links with Southeast Asia.

As the report says: "Paramount among the outcomes of these connections is the creation of a pool of resources with expertise in cross-cultural commerce out of which global networks can develop."

I would like to point to a few examples of New Zealanders in Southeast Asia who have enjoyed success in a number of sectors including tourism and public relations.

- **Former RNZ journalist Bronwen Evans who has been working in public relations since 1999 and is owner and director of the Faasai Resort and Spa in Thailand and is President of the Bangkok Chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC).**
- **New Zealand public relations firm Baldwin Boyle Group headed by Greg Shand which established an office in Bangkok in 1997, following a long history in Singapore.**
- **Alastair Carthew, formerly of Air New Zealand and TVNZ, who now lives in Phuket and runs his own public relations company, AC Public Relations Counsel.**

And complementary to that are the Kiwi Southeast Asians who have become successful in New Zealand.

- **Melissa Lee is the one of six Asian Members of Parliament. Although she is an ethnic Korean, she grew up in Malaysia. Before she entered politics she worked a television producer and journalist.**
- **Vino Ramayah is Singaporean-born and graduated in Law at the University of Singapore. He holds a Masters of Laws from the University of London and is chair of Cereus Holdings, an investment holding company whose investments in New Zealand, Australia and Asia include health and bio-informatics, and bio-technology. Vino is also a trustee of the Asia New Zealand Foundation.**
- **Mitchell Pham is a successful software entrepreneur who runs Augen which has offices in Auckland and Ho Chi Minh City. Mitchell came to New Zealand as a child refugee, one of the celebrated boat people who left Vietnam after the war.**
- **Lincoln Tan is a New Zealand Herald journalist who plays an important role in reporting the views of and issues involving**

Auckland's Asian communities in one of New Zealand's most read newspapers and websites.

It is also worth mentioning that our Prime Minister John Key spent a formative year in Singapore where he was head of Asian foreign exchange for Merrill Lynch.

In my previous role as New Zealand's High Commissioner in Singapore, I was impressed and gratified by the warmth of the relationship between our two countries and indeed, more generally between ASEAN and New Zealand.

It's a close relationship that is historical. When you look back to the Colombo Plan, it is evident that the ties that link us to Southeast Asia are strong ones.

In fact the Intersections report says "the New Zealand-born and their families, the returned migrants who have once lived in New Zealand and international students who have studied in New Zealand" all play a role in establishing and maintaining links across Southeast Asian society and between the region and New Zealand.

Of course integral to this is are the strong Southeast Asian communities that have put down roots in New Zealand, particularly those that are part of active transnational networks.

For the New Zealand government, policy makers, educationalists, business people and others in all walks of life, New Zealand's links with Southeast Asia are growing and it's a natural process given the extensive diaspora networks that exist between us and the region.

These relationships help the activities and support of key agencies such as, in the case of New Zealand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and New Zealand Trade and Enterprise because the relationships already exist.

The challenge for New Zealand is to use these relationships successfully in to the mutual benefit of all of us.

But the reputation of New Zealand as being welcoming to Asian migrants, investors, holiday makers, students and buyers stands us in good stead.

It is a reputation that we are working hard to maintain and to protect.