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MEDIA RELEASE

Languages and cultures education: Keys to a globalised world and social cohesion

Melbourne, Victoria 11 July 2007

On Saturday, 7 July, 400 Community Language School teachers gathered at the 2007 Victorian State Community Language Schools conference at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

Community Languages Schools are after-hours schools, managed and supported by culturally and linguistically diverse Australian communities to promote and teach their language. There are 69 languages represented in the 1,000 Community Languages Schools across Australia.

Under the banner of the Ethnic Schools Association of Victoria (ESAV), the volunteer teachers enthusiastically participated in a range of workshops promoting current best practice in teaching and learning. Mr Tony Cook, from the Victorian Education Department, congratulated teachers on the quality of their work and encouraged the building of strong relationships with mainstream schools to further support the uptake of language learning in Victorian classrooms.

The connection between learning languages and social cohesion has been made in a range of national and international research. Professor Michael Clyne, noted linguistics expert asserts that '*...it is widely accepted that Australia's language resources are of value to the nation as well as to the individual, in the interests of social justice and cohesion, cultural enrichment and economic assets*'

Mr Stefan Romaniw OAM, Executive Director of Community Languages Australia noted that every week across Australia, 108,000 students attend Community Language School programs. When the teachers, families and communities of these students are factored in, some half a million people are connected through Community Languages Schools programs across the nation. These schools serve to strengthen and maintain Australia's vital language asset as well as being powerful positive change agents in communities.

Recognising the importance of these schools to Australia's social fabric, state-based Ethnic schools associations have come together under a newly formed coordination body, Community Languages Australia. The new body will deliver crucial support to Community Languages Schools, and is currently implementing a range of initiatives. These include:

- a national Statement which outlines key purpose, governance and quality standards for schools
- an Operations and Administrative Procedures manual to assist schools with local Education Department requirements and other useful advice
- a Quality Framework for Community Languages Schools developed in consultation with states and Territories

If the joy, interest, commitment, respect and dedication shown by participants at the Community Language Schools conference are indicators of success, then students in these schools are receiving quality language experiences.

Further information about Community Languages Australia, including pdf copies of the new Statement and Operations Manual can be found at:
<http://www.communitylanguagesaustralia.org.au/DEST.html>

For further media enquiries, contact **Mr Fahry Abubaker** on telephone 03 9347 0378
