



FeNCAA
Federation of Nepalese Community
Associations of Australia

For Immediate Release

Contact: Mr Bom Yonzon, Spokesperson

Mobile: +61 422 443 268

Email: info@fencaa.org.au

Website: www.fencaa.org.au

Press Release: FeNCAA Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Canberra, ACT, 15th June 2020: FeNCAA is an established national consortium of the legally registered Nepalese community organisations of Australia to facilitate collaboration and coordination amongst its member organisations and to liaise and advocate greater community interest unitedly with federal, state and local governments, businesses and broader communities in Australia, and work closely with the Australian Government to strengthen multiculturalism in Australia.

A national level teleconference of the Nepalese community organisations of Australia was held on Sunday March 22nd 2020 to find ways to overcome the adverse impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people of Nepalese origin, mainly Nepalese international students and Nepalese temporary visa holders currently residing in Australia. The meeting was coordinated by the Non-Resident Nepalese Association Australia (NRNA-A) and attended by many Nepalese community organisations, including the Federation of Nepalese Community Associations of Australia (FeNCAA), the Embassy of Nepal and the Nepalese Consulates of Australia.

The meeting agreed to work unitedly and formed a number of national level taskforces based on specific tasks to respond to the COVID-19 crisis more efficiently and in time. FeNCAA was given responsibility of coordinating the COVID-19 Advocacy Taskforce which included NRNA Australia, Australian Nepalese Journalist Association (ANJA), Australian Education Consultants Alliance (AECA) and All Nepalese Students Association in Australia (ANSAA).

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, FeNCAA had already commenced its advocacy initiatives prior to the formation of the COVID-19 Advocacy Taskforce. It had approached Federal and State governments and political leaders seeking financial and healthcare support to the Nepalese international students and holders of temporary visas.

FeNCAA also liaised and worked together with other federal organisations, including the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA), Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO), and the South Asian Federation ACT (SAFACT), to put the issues of international students and temporary visa holders to the Australian Federal and State/Territory governments.

Since in-person meetings were not feasible due to the COVID-19 restrictions, FeNCAA communicated with all stakeholders through email and phone calls.

FeNCAA sent a request letter to the following Federal Government Ministers and Shadow Ministers:

- The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia, on 25th March 2020 (First Letter)
- The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia, on 30th March 2020 (Second Letter)
- The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Federal Minister for Health, on 23rd March 2020
- Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Federal Minister for Families and Social Services, on 23rd March 2020
- The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Leader of the Opposition, House of Representatives, on 1st April 2020
- Hon Richard Marles MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, House of Representatives, on 1st April 2020
- Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senate, on 1st April 2020
- Senator the Hon Kristina Keneally, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senate, on 1st April 2020



FeNCAA's request letters emphasised on the severity of the impact of COVID-19 on Nepalese international students, who contributes over \$2.6 billion annually to the Australian economy, and the temporary visa holders and sought financial and healthcare support from Federal and State/Territory Governments. FeNCAA also requested to immediately provide accommodation to those international students who are required to remain in self-isolation.

The request letters are posted on the FeNCAA'S website for community information.

Responses from the government ministers and shadow ministers are positive. On behalf of the Prime Minister, the Hon Ben Morton MP, Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister and Cabinet, responded with the following remarks:

- The government commends the work of FeNCAA and thanked for its's support during this crisis period.
- The minister emphasises on the important role of migrants in economic and social development of Australia.
- The government has announced a number of concessions for temporary via holders, their employers and their communities.
- The Extension of visa arrangements of temporary visa holders.
- Access of superannuation by students and temporary visa holders
- \$7m to Australian Red Cross to support needy people including international students and temporary visa holders
- Australian Govt has agreed to fund 50 per cent of the costs incurred by state and territory governments in diagnosing and treating all people, regardless of Medicare eligibility
- Students can access free, private and confidential counselling from Beyond Blue.
- For additional support, PM office has referred our request to Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Federal Minister for Families and Social Services

Furthermore, FeNCAA has been working with the Nepalese and other community organisations at the state/territory level advocating State/Territory Governments, local governments and political leaders to seek support for international students and temporary visa holders. A joint request letter was sent by Nepalese Australian Association (NAA) and FeNCAA to the following ministers in NSW on 4th May 2020:

- The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP, Premier NSW, NSW, letter sent
- The Hon. Geoff Lee MP, Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, Acting Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans
- The Hon. Bronwyn Taylor MLC, Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women

Following the advocacy by many Nepalese and other multicultural community organisations in states and territories, State/Territory governments in all states and territories have released support packages for international students and temporary visa holders, although the packages are not suffice to meet the need of international students and temporary visa holders. Hence, FeNCAA will continue its advocacy in support of additional support to international students and temporary visa holders.

FeNCAA also contributed \$500 to the Nepalese Community COVID-19 Relief Fund coordinated by NRNA Australia to provide essential support to the needy Nepalese students severely affected by the crisis.

FeNCAA joined a petition campaign in support of international students and temporary visa holders on change.org. The petition which was run by Dr Anupam Pokharel and Ms Punam Pant received support from over 5,000 individuals (<https://www.change.org/p/scott-morrison-a-fair-go-to-international-students-and-temporary-visa-holders-amid-the-global-crisis>).

Since the lockdown due to the COVID-19 crisis has been going for a long time, many community members have lost their jobs and closing down their small businesses. As a result, an increasing number of the Nepalese community members are under stress, and it may affect their mental health in the long run.



Hence, FeNCAA in collaboration with other community organisations has been lobbying Federal Government for more support to tackle the mental health issues in the Australian migrant communities.

After successfully organising the first two repatriation flights, the Embassy of Nepal in Canberra organised a community consultation meeting on Monday 29th June 2020 to explore the possibility of organising additional repatriation flights from Australia to Nepal at a lower cost and subsequently a taskforce was formed to explore the possibility and organise the flights. The taskforce is coordinated by NRNA Australia and consists representatives from the Embassy of Nepal, Nepalese Consulates, NRNA Australia, Australasian Nepalese Medical and Dental Association (ANMDA), Australian Nepalese Journalist Association (ANJA) and Federation of Nepalese Community Associations of Australia (FeNCAA).

The taskforce with the support of the Embassy of Nepal and Nepalese community-based travel agencies currently operating in Australia and Nepal successfully organised a semi-chartered repatriation flight (commercial flight from Australia to Singapore and the full chartered flight from Singapore to Kathmandu) on Tuesday 14th July 2020 using Singapore Airlines. The taskforce is also working hard to organise two more flights very soon.

Also, in response to the expected drastic cut in the Australia's bilateral aid program in Nepal, FeNCAA joined hands with other Nepalese community organisations as well as non-government organisations supporting humanitarian and development programs in Nepal to write a petition letter to the Australian Government requesting to retain the bilateral aid program in Nepal, especially at this critical time when small economies like Nepal is severely affected by COVID-19. The petition letters were signed by 19 organisations and sent to the Hon. Alex Hawke MP, Federal Minister for International Development and the Pacific, and the Senator Hon. Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women.

Lastly, FeNCAA highly appreciates the Embassy of Nepal, Nepalese consulates, Nepalese community organisations, community leaders and volunteers for their valuable contribution to the COVID-19 relief initiatives undertaken to lessen the adverse impact of COVID-19 on the members of the Nepalese communities in Australia, and it extends its sincere thanks to all of them, especially NRNA Australia, ANMDA, ANJA, AECA and ANSAA.

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Mr Bom Yonzon
Spokesperson