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SENATE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Economic, social and political conditions in East Timor

THURSDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 1999

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SENATE
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES COMMITTEE
Thursday, 9 September 1999

Members: Senator Hogg (*Chair*), Senator Brownhill (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bourne, Lightfoot, Quirke and West

Substitute members:

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Boswell, Brown, Calvert, Chapman, Cook, Coonan, Crane, Eggleston, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Forshaw, Gibbs, Gibson, Harradine, Knowles, Mason, McGauran, Parer, Pyne, Tchen, Tierney and Watson

Senators in attendance: Senators Bourne, Brownhill, Hogg and Lightfoot

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

- (a) economic, social and political conditions in East Timor including respect for human rights in the territory;
- (b) Indonesia's military presence in East Timor and reports of ongoing conflict in the territory;
- (c) the prospects for a just and lasting settlement of the East Timor conflict;
- (d) Australia's humanitarian and development assistance in East Timor;
- (e) the Timor Gap (Zone of Cooperation Treaty); and
- (f) past and present Australian Government policy toward East Timor including the issue of East Timorese self-determination.

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Committee met at 9.08 a.m.**SCHEINER, Mr Charles, UN Representative, International Federation for East Timor**

CHAIR—Welcome. This is a public meeting of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee. The committee will continue the hearings which began in Darwin yesterday. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but should you at any stage wish to give any part of your evidence in private, you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I now invite you to make an opening statement, and then we will proceed to questions if necessary. If you can give us the background and the basis on which you are appearing, up front, that would be helpful for the *Hansard* record.

Mr Scheiner—I would be glad to. I am speaking for the International Federation for East Timor observer project. The International Federation for East Timor is an eight-year-old federation of about 35 organisations all over the world, including several in Australia, that are concerned about human rights and self-determination for East Timor.

When the UN process began about six months ago, we began to discuss the best way to ensure that the vote in East Timor was free and fair and that the results of that vote would be followed by the various powers that be to ensure that, once the opinion of the people of East Timor was consulted, that opinion was followed. To do that, we set up our observer project which selected, trained and recruited about 125 volunteer observers from 22 different countries who went to East Timor, beginning in June, as UN accredited, non-partisan observers. We had a code of conduct that the United Nations put out for observers, and we had our own code of conduct, which was actually stricter than the UN code.

We went to East Timor for three purposes. We went to be official observers with the UN to ensure that the consultation was carried out in a free and fair manner. We also went to observing on general human rights issues because, even if the details of the process of the consultation were to be carried out fairly, if people's rights were violated or threatened to be violated, the result of the consultation would not be fair. As a secondary point, we also went to provide what is often called 'accompaniment'. I will give one specific example. On election day, about 100 people who had been displaced from their homes in one part of Dili, East Timor, and who were in a refugee camp in another area wanted to go and vote, but they needed some sort of protection. They needed people to go with them as they went to vote, and we did that. We did similar kinds of things around the country.

Our people were not only volunteers in giving their time. Almost all of them paid their own way to get to East Timor or raised the money locally. It was a grassroots, self-sufficient project. Not everyone came and went at the same time. The first people came early in June. We observed the voter registration, the campaign and the whole process all the way through. At the time the vote result was announced—the 78 per cent of the people who voted against autonomy and for independence—we still had about 60 people in East Timor. That was on 4 September. On the day of the vote, we had 15 teams. We had teams out in every district of East Timor. After the voting, and particularly as the result was announced and as the militias got more and more out of control, we began to withdraw our teams. Last Sunday and Monday—and Tuesday was the last group—our people were evacuated from East Timor by

the Royal Australian Air Force. Most of us were directed by our embassies to leave. So that is the context.

Just one other thing: while we were there, we published numerous reports. We had nine formal reports—‘report number so and so, date so and so’—and probably 10 or 15 media releases and various other less public communications to UNAMET about particular conditions. We were probably in communication with UNAMET dozens of times every day, either on the phone or in writing. They were very responsive to, and very cooperative on, the concerns and issues that we raised.

What became increasingly clear—especially over the last week—was that, even though UNAMET were doing the best possible job that they could do, they faced two fundamental problems. The first was that Indonesia did not keep to their side of the 5 May accord where they said that they would provide security in East Timor. They said that they would provide security for observers, people like ourselves, for the UN people and for the voters, so that the voters could vote in a free and fair manner. They did none of those. The second problem was from the international community as represented by the United Nations Security Council. Even though the UNAMET people were out there working incredibly hard, taking major risks and doing the best job that they could—and in our assessment of the vote process, we found that they did an almost impeccable job in managing that process—they did not get support from the Security Council. That has become increasingly clear over the last few days, where the 100 or so international UNAMET people who are left in East Timor have been virtually imprisoned in their compound.

The Security Council and the other governments of the world, with the notable exception of Australia—I must say, Australia has been better than almost any other government on this; it has been a long time coming, but it is very welcome—have played diplomatic games. If it is all right with you, I would like to read a statement that we issued yesterday after the last of our observers were evacuated from Baucau. It is not very long. Then if you have any questions, I would be glad to answer them.

Senator BROWNHILL—It is your time, but you can have that incorporated if you want.

Mr Scheiner—Otherwise I have to say the same things that are in the statement.

CHAIR—Just table it and we will incorporate it in *Hansard*. That will save you reading it. We are trying to assist you.

Mr Scheiner—Okay.

CHAIR—Would you like to paraphrase it for us?

Mr Scheiner—I can paraphrase it, sure. That is fine.

CHAIR—And we will formally incorporate that document in *Hansard* later.

Mr Scheiner—By the time we left, virtually all other internationals had left. There were very few journalists left. On Monday night, David Wimhurst, the spokesman for UNAMET, and many other UNAMET people were on the plane that I was on. On Tuesday, Bishop Belo was on the plane that the last of our people came out on from Baucau. At this point, there are no formal observers like us left or observers like the press or NGO workers, humanitarian aid workers or UN staff. The only ones that are left are basically imprisoned in the UN compound. We hear reports. For example, I heard a report last night, and I cannot confirm the report because I cannot call anybody in Suai, that at a church in Suai—people may remember that a week ago the water was cut off to that church—the priest, Father Hilario, and 900 refugees sheltering in that church were killed in a militia attack. I cannot confirm that.

CHAIR—Where do these reports come from?

Mr Scheiner—This one I got from talking to someone from our project who was in Jakarta and had gotten word from people in Suai. It is very difficult to communicate.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—For Hansard, could you please spell the name of that place.

Mr Scheiner—It is S-u-a-i. Suai is a city in the southern part of East Timor. I just cite that as one example of what could well be happening all over East Timor. It is very much like what happened in 1975 when the Indonesian military invaded and the rest of the world left. Some very brave Australian journalists were killed, as I am sure you know. The killing went on for 15 years before the world opened its eyes and started to pay a little bit of attention.

This time we do not have the excuse that we do not know. There were thousands of observers there; many of us just left a few days ago. It was very predictable what was going on. If you read the reports that we have been filing and the letters we have been sending to the United Nations since May, even, we have been saying that most East Timorese people feared a bloodbath after the results were announced. There were specific militia documents that were released that threatened that. For us—meaning the world community—not to be responding to a very predictable and almost inevitable scenario is an incredible neglect of our responsibility.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—When you say ‘our’ responsibility, who do you mean?

Mr Scheiner—The people of the world. It includes the Australian government and it includes, even more so, my government, which is responding less than the Australian government. For any of us to stand by as people are slaughtered in what could be and still is a very easily avoidable situation—

Senator BROWNHILL—How is it easily avoidable? It is all simplistic. Do you want to declare war on Indonesia?

Mr Scheiner—I think Indonesia has declared war on the international community. It is not a question of us declaring war on them when they do direct attacks on the UN. There were Indonesian police firing at UN vehicles in Baucau yesterday as the UN were on their

way to the airport to flee the country. If they were firing on Australian vehicles—and the Australian Consulate, I think, is being evacuated today—then this is not a normal situation. The aggression has already come. It is a question of whether we respond.

Senator BROWNHILL—The only country in the world that has got the ability to do that and give the backing to the United Nations is the United States of America—your own country.

Mr Scheiner—Yes, I agree with you 100 per cent. I think that my country should be taking a much more forward stance on this. The United States should certainly be joining, and probably taking the leadership, in forming an international coalition of peace enforcement forces. You are not going to find me defending the inaction of the Clinton administration.

The vote—which was able to be carried out in a manner that was not totally free and fair but, if anything, the results were biased in favour of the pro-autonomy forces because of the intimidation that was going on—shows very clearly that at least 78 per cent and probably, if the number of people who were intimidated into voting other than the way they believed was significant, 90 per cent of the people of East Timor want to be independent. The legal status of East Timor for the last 24 years has been as a non-self-governing territory awaiting an act of self-determination. That act of self-determination has now occurred. It is time for Australia and the United States and everyone to recognise that East Timor is not now a province of Indonesia. Whether it ever was before or not, we can debate in some academic theory decades from now, but it is not now a province of Indonesia, clearly. There is no need to get Indonesian government consent for the United Nations to come in.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But that is not quite right. Legally it is still a province of Indonesia. It is one that Australia recognises. If it is not, what is it? What is its status?

Mr Scheiner—Its status is what the rest of the world besides Australia has always recognised it as, which is a non-self-governing territory under Portuguese administration.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—That is not Australia's position.

Mr Scheiner—I know, but it is the position of the entire rest of the world. It is eight UN General Assembly resolutions. It is two UN Security Council resolutions from the 1970s. I know Australia has had a different position—

Senator LIGHTFOOT—All I am saying is a plebiscite vote does not necessarily make it an independent country.

Mr Scheiner—But the plebiscite vote was as a result of an agreement between Indonesia, the United Nations and Portugal and it was ratified many times in different General Assembly resolutions. I am not sure what kind of legal process there is internationally. You all know much better than I do how the Australian government works. I cannot speak for that. But internationally, which is what I can try to represent, it is a non-self-governing territory under Portuguese administration.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—What do you do when you are not in Indonesia or you are not representing East Timor?

Mr Scheiner—Do you mean professionally?

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes.

Mr Scheiner—I am a software engineer. I write software for medical equipment.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Is this the only international project that you have on, with your volunteers?

Mr Scheiner—Yes. The observer project was specifically formed—

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Just for East Timor. You have 35 organisations throughout the world. What does that mean? Could you explain quickly where those organisations are?

Mr Scheiner—I do not have a list in front of me. I can list the countries. I may not get them all.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—How many people in your organisation?

CHAIR—Could you supply that to the committee? It would be interesting.

Mr Scheiner—I can supply that. We do not have individual members. It is a coalition of organisations. The organisations are in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Philippines, which is where our international secretariat is, Malaysia, France, Britain, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany—

Senator LIGHTFOOT—How many people are there on average in your organisations in these countries?

Mr Scheiner—They vary widely.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—From?

Mr Scheiner—I am a coordinator of the organisation in the US that is part of this. We have about 9,000 members in the United States.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Throughout the US?

Mr Scheiner—Yes. I cannot tell you how many in the other organisations.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—When you said there could have been 900 church people killed in Suai, where did that appalling evidence come from?

Mr Scheiner—I do not know if you recall about a week and a half ago there were a lot of news stories about 3,000 refugees huddled in the church in Suai and the militia had cut off the water.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—What date was this? Have you seen this in the media?

Mr Scheiner—No. There are no journalists there to report it. It is not in the media. That is precisely the point I am trying to make.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Where did it come from?

Mr Scheiner—I spoke with someone in Jakarta who works with the Yayasan Hak, which is an East Timorese human rights organisation, all of whose staff were forced out of East Timor yesterday. I spoke with someone in Jakarta who works with the Yayasan Hak. He had gotten the word from people in Suai that the church had been attacked. I do not think there was anyone there to count the 900 bodies, but that was their estimate of how many people had been killed and that the priest, Father Hilario, also had been killed. This is what is happening all over East Timor and we do not know the details because nobody is there to tell us. The phones are cut off. The communications are cut off, the transportation is cut off and we are closing our eyes to it.

Senator BROWNHILL—The UN representative who had been there and who has come back said on the *Today* program this morning there were 100—

Mr Scheiner—There has been no UN representative there for about five days. I did not see the *Today* program.

Senator BROWNHILL—He confirmed that there were 100.

Mr Scheiner—There were 100 killed there maybe three or four days ago, but the report was 900 were killed yesterday.

Senator BROWNHILL—He confirmed it this morning. I am not going to argue.

CHAIR—We will take your evidence. It is futile for us to get into a debate as to whether there were 100 or 900. The fact that there was one is one too many.

Mr Scheiner—Can I make a suggestion to the committee, which is that the Australian government send a fact finding delegation to Suai to find out what happened?

CHAIR—That is not the purpose of why we are here today. We are taking contemporary evidence which will assist this committee and will assist the government, undoubtedly, in what it does in the longer term. But the sort of recommendations we look to make to the government we are yet to sit down and determine.

Mr Scheiner—Of course; I am just making a suggestion.

CHAIR—That is fine.

Mr Scheiner—I agree that the longer term is important but the short term is crucial. Hundreds of people are dying every day.

CHAIR—That is something I have already spoken publicly about on behalf of the committee. I have expressed without any formal decision of the committee our absolute abhorrence at what is taking place. As I have reported to my colleagues, we have also called on the United Nations to lift its game. I think there is a general concurrence among the members of this committee, without us having to deliver a formal report, to see that this happens. I thank you for the evidence you have presented to us this morning. It has been a valuable addition to the evidence we have had. We will now formally incorporate in *Hansard* your statement entitled ‘International Federation for East Timor Observer Project: Media Statement, Darwin, Australia. 8 September, 1999’. Is it the wish of the committee that the document be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The statement read as follows—

[9.27 a.m.]

SHOESMITH, Dr Dennis, Senior Lecturer, Member, Board, Centre for Southern Asian Studies

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have anything to add to the capacity in which you are appearing?

Dr Shoesmith—I am making a submission today about how the university could contribute to the rehabilitation of East Timor if and when that becomes possible but I do not represent the formal position of the university. I represent informal discussions, including support from the Pro Vice-Chancellor for International Affairs.

CHAIR—That is fine. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but should you at any stage wish to give any part of your evidence in private you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. The committee now has before it a formal written submission which, subject to the normal perusal by the committee, will then become a public document. I now invite you to make an opening statement and then we will proceed to questions. Over to you, Dr Shoesmith.

Dr Shoesmith—The submission has been overtaken by the events of the past nine days. When it was drafted there did seem a possibility in the medium term of Australian assistance to East Timor in the transition to independence. If and when that situation becomes possible again for Australia to deliver a development and humanitarian aid program, that is the focus of this submission. Hopefully, it will become a relevant submission if events improve in the future but, of course, nobody is in the position to assess when that possibility will come.

CHAIR—Before you proceed to make your submission, can you give us your view on the transition process to independence in East Timor, in broad terms? I am not going to hold you to this. There are a variety of views floating around out there in the ether as to what the transition process is. When we started out with the inquiry there were people who believed that the ballot would take place at some stage in the future but the day the result was announced was the day independence would be proclaimed. It would be an automatic swapover from one regime to another regime that day. We have also had witnesses who have led us down a more stepped path, if one can call it that. So there is a disparity of views. I would be interested in your view and then, if you can relate that as to how you see the program that you have before us intermeshing with that.

Dr Shoesmith—The steps were set out in the United Nations agreement. From my point of view they were not feasible. But the idea, as you know, was that after the ballot there would be a transition period until the Indonesian Representative Assembly formalised the severance with East Timor if that was the way the ballot went, as it did. That process could resume but it means that the phases in East Timor are linked to what is happening in Jakarta. I am very pessimistic about the situation in Jakarta because it could not be a worse time for a country to attempt the steps towards independence given, as I see it—to put it as briefly as I can—a transitional president who is not able to control the Indonesian military, in the transition to a new president later this year, reasserting its central position in Indonesian politics. East Timor is being caught up in that agenda, that political dynamic in Jakarta. So

to try and talk about East Timor as a self-contained process is mistaken in my view because it is actually a function of domestic politics, Indonesian politics, in Jakarta.

Nevertheless, in one respect East Timor is like a natural disaster. Whatever happens in Indonesian politics and whatever continuing political problems the East Timorese people have, there is also an international need, when it becomes possible, for a disaster relief program because it is a political disaster but it is going to result in famine and a lot of other very bad long-term consequences.

This submission does not address the security problem in East Timor and it does not address the necessity for a disaster relief program. What it does address is the phase after that, if and when that comes. That phase is a transition to independence, I would hope, a form of autonomy, as the other option appears in the UN agreement. In that phase, which could take two or three years, this proposal suggests practical ways that the Northern Territory university and Darwin could contribute to the strengthening of the capacity of the East Timorese people to establish a viable set of governing institutions and, more challengingly, to establish a civil society where there was sufficient social cohesion for a new state or an autonomous province to be politically and socially viable. They are very challenging things but the submission attempts to think of specific practical programs that could contribute in that later interval to that reconstruction.

CHAIR—The view that has been put to us by one witness in Melbourne recently was that we may well be trying to put our priorities on the East Timorese rather than realistically assessing the East Timorese priorities. It may well be that in the first instance what needs to be done are very simple things as prioritised by the East Timorese, like putting in a decent sanitation and water supply, basic medical services and roads so that people can be got to. We heard one witness tell us that a doctor had to walk five hours over impossible terrain to get to someone who was ill and then walk five hours back. Some of our expectations, whilst they might be honourable, may well be misplaced in the initial process.

Views were also put to us—and I would be interested in your views on this—as to the actual evolution of the independence. Given the untenable violence that is taking place there currently, we hope we can get over that phase relatively shortly and then get down to the process of establishing the independent East Timor. Someone has put to us that there are steps to be taken in educating people in the political processes—putting basic infrastructure in place by way of a temporary administration. Academics or NGOs are putting these things to us. It is a matter of rebuilding the whole life and lifestyle of a country that has been torn apart. Where does your program fit into that?

Dr Shoesmith—It starts there. I was in Cambodia in 1992-93 and I saw the United Nations program there. I went there on a research project. In that situation, which is different to the East Timorese situation, the UN had a human rights component, a civil administration component. There were all sorts of attempts at programs that would contribute to a social and political environment that would allow free elections to take place and, hopefully beyond that, for the emergence of a democratic political system.

Although there are very large differences with East Timor, I think that should be addressed in Australia's development of humanitarian programs—when they can be delivered

in East Timor. While I absolutely agree that the immediate practical demands of basic infrastructure and basic social services and health are the top priority, in the longer term East Timor, because of this history of violence, invasion and so on, will require special international effort for it to get on its feet. In terms of Australia's humanitarian interest we should contribute to that as usefully and as effectively as possible.

There is another dimension to it, too. If there is an independent East Timor on our northern borders, then it is in Australia's interest that it is a viable and coherent society and that it can stand on its feet. We do not want—nor do the East Timorese people want—a basket case situation that just goes on and on. If we can find practical ways in that later stage to contribute to nation building and to reconstruction and social cohesion, then we should. The submission very carefully repeats that any programs like that have to be done in partnership with the East Timorese representative groups, whether they are the church groups, NGOs or political representatives. That is inescapable and necessary.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Dr Shoesmith, you seem to be ignoring the imperative of the protocol—that it will probably go back to Portuguese administration prior to it doing anything. You might care to comment on that. It was taken illegally from the administration of Portugal. It seems to me—and we have had some evidence—that it will go back to the Portuguese administration prior to self-government, part self-government, or whatever.

Dr Shoesmith—I think that the Australian development and humanitarian contribution would be located within not just an Australian effort but an international structure. If it were the United Nations, for example, we could negotiate our contributions through the way the UN sets up this transition period. If Portugal is involved, I am sure that the Australian government could negotiate the appropriate ways to deliver its programs with the Portuguese.

If you look at the two options that the East Timorese were given, the one that they rejected also included an increasing East Timorese contribution to managing themselves. I know that it seems unreasonable at this time to talk about reconstruction and development aid, because the crisis is so enormous, but there must come a time when Australia will have to calculate how it can most effectively assist the East Timorese, whatever situation emerges in the longer term, to rehabilitate their society and get up some structures of self-management.

CHAIR—I have a question before you proceed. Although this has come before this committee and we welcome your submission, because one of the things we are charged with is looking at the future, where do ideas such as yours normally end up? I am not trying to be nasty to you here, but are they academic ideas that have nowhere to go when they could be basically very good sensible ideas? Is there a coordinating place, a coordinating organisation, where there should be a process by which people can feed in their ideas as to how we can approach our development assistance to an independent East Timor? Should that be governmental, should it be a mixture of government, NGOs and other organisations? Who should have the coordinating responsibility? One of the things that has become evident in the inquiry is that there could well be a number of disparate forces, all with the best of intentions, falling over each other in effect and with us not maximising our capacity to put real assistance in there. It seems to me that some of the things that you have got here are very practical suggestions indeed.

Dr Shoemith—This submission tries to make some points about general principles, but it is actually concerned with quite specific proposals. For example, it appears to us that communication in East Timor is a vital thing and that a radio station, for example, or an audiovisual and print media would be very important in the transition period.

I take your point that there has to be, on the Australian side for our program, coordination and rationalisation of effort, but I do think that Darwin is an obvious platform for the delivery in the future of a number of Australian programs. Very specifically, I think that the rehabilitation of the university in Dili would be a very worthwhile project for Australia to contribute to and that a partnership between the university in Dili and the university here in Darwin, with staff exchanges, joint projects, the training of that first generation of civil servants, administrators and media people in East Timor, when it reaches that stage, would be a very practical contribution. The university here is not able to coordinate a large scale development program to East Timor, but it can coordinate aspects of it that are quite productive, I would think, in the long term, in helping the East Timorese get on their feet—training, VET and higher education level, collaboration with upgrading the qualifications of the staff at the university in Dili and student scholarships. This would require financial support from Canberra. The university does not have the financial resources either to pay for such programs, but it has the personnel, the infrastructure and the expertise to make useful contributions.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Do you mean student scholarships offered by the Darwin university or offered by the Australian government or other sources?

Dr Shoemith—I think they would have to be offered by the Australian government, and they could be very practical scholarships.

Senator BROWNHILL—I understand that the infrastructure of the university is not there anymore, is it?

Dr Shoemith—The university in Dili has been destroyed, and I acknowledge that a rehabilitation of that institution would mean building it from nothing. But there has to be a university in Dili eventually, because the contribution a university in Dili could make is crucial. One of the things that East Timor will need in the future is a trained, educated population that can contribute to its self-governance and its development.

There are advantages for the university here, although it is small and new, that are not shared by larger universities in Australia down south. It is not just that we are next door to them and that there is an East Timorese population here, but I think that the scale of the university in Darwin is appropriate to the rehabilitation of a university in East Timor.

CHAIR—What sort of language do you anticipate would be used in the reconstituted university at Dili?

Dr Shoemith—I think it would have to be initially trilingual and then bilingual. It would have to be Portuguese, Tetum and English. I think English language training is very important for East Timor, but of course the East Timorese will make these decisions.

CHAIR—Yes, we understand that.

Senator BOURNE—I was interested in what you said about the scholarships, because at the moment the Australian government has a program of scholarships for Burmese students taken from the border refugees to train them so they can go back to Burma. So I suppose we could consider recommending to the government that they consider the same sort of thing for East Timor, which is in fact closer to us anyway than Burma. Apparently, it has worked quite well up until now with that one. It is a really interesting idea.

The other point you made that I thought was particularly interesting was the one about communication. We all remember that, when the French decided to do something constructive with New Caledonia, the first thing they set up were courses so that the New Caledonians could do their own radio, their own television and their own newspapers. It seems to me that it is a very similar sort of situation—that the East Timorese are not themselves involved enough in that sort of thing. We could of course look at starting to train people now along those lines. Do you have any idea how the Northern Territory University could be involved in training people for the professions in East Timor, as well?

Dr Shoemith—Yes. On the media, Australia is beautifully placed to make a very useful contribution to media in East Timor. There is an appendix in my submission which comes from Marilynne Smith. Over the last five years, the ABC has been very successful in delivering these programs, funded by AusAID, in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and in South Africa. I have spoken to Marilynne Smith and, in general terms, she is quite supportive of the idea that the university here and the ABC could put a joint proposal in for AusAID support to set up a facility in Dili when that is possible. As you say, training could begin earlier here in multimedia production and training, so that when the time comes there will be a cadre of media professionals—East Timorese—who could then provide that essential service. I know it is not as essential as food and health, but in the longer term the contribution of a free media and communication is very important. I think that could start fairly early. There was a cooperative agreement between Macquarie University and the ABC in an earlier project for media training.

What happens is that the ABC has the experience to provide the industry training for media executives, managers, journalists and media workers—which could also include NGOs and civil servants, in this case—and the university provides the educational back-up and award training, so that somebody comes out with practical hands-on industrial training from the ABC and a university course which has an associated significance such as mass communication, community development or culture management and gets an award for it. So the person has a qualification from an Australian institution or from their own institution, if that becomes possible. The practical hands-on training puts them in a position to provide a service to East Timor that otherwise would not be there, and it is a crucial service.

Senator BOURNE—Exactly. What sort of ability would the Northern Territory University also have with the professions in helping to train?

Dr Shoemith—An advantage of the university here is that it offers courses across the whole spectrum, from VET training to PhDs. In VET training, we actually have experience in delivering programs in eastern Indonesia, and we have collaborative arrangements with

universities in Malaysia and elsewhere. In that sense, even practical things like training electricians and apprentice programs and so on can be offered from this base as well as the higher degree and postgraduate programs. I have listed in dot points some of the areas that we can contribute to.

Senator BOURNE—Yes, thank you for that. There is a lot there and, obviously, there is an awful lot that is going to be needed.

Dr Shoemith—I would like to say that I know it is beyond the university's financial capacity to offer these programs on its own or without support.

Senator BOURNE—I think that would be the case, but we hope there will eventually be a huge international aid project. There will have to be for it to survive. I think that sounds very encouraging. Thank you.

Senator BROWNHILL—Do you think we can say retrospectively that the timing of this referendum was very bad, disastrous?

Dr Shoemith—Absolutely disastrous.

Senator BROWNHILL—There had just been a change in the voting patterns, a democratic election in Indonesia and a move away from army rule. So the UN has really got something to answer for. Or has the international community got something to answer for for having bad timing in the first instance and then by not standing by their bad timing now?

Dr Shoemith—The decision was made by President Habibie in Jakarta, and it astonished a lot of people at the time. I want to be quite clear, I am in favour of East Timorese independence from Indonesia. What we have to acknowledge now is that the ballot was held, and it was an overwhelmingly clear statement by the East Timorese people in the most difficult circumstances.

Senator BROWNHILL—And it has been accepted by Habibie.

Dr Shoemith—Yes.

Senator BROWNHILL—Whether it will be accepted by the Indonesian government after it changes is another matter.

Dr Shoemith—That is right, and it is being used—this is just my view—by the Indonesian generals to advance their role in Indonesian politics in a brutal way for when the next president comes into power.

Senator BROWNHILL—You have said this already: the problem of East Timor is really not the problem of Indonesia; the problem of Indonesia is a problem for East Timor. I have not put words into your mouth there.

Dr Shoemith—East Timor is entangled in Indonesian politics in Jakarta.

Senator BROWNHILL—That is why there is no easy answer. People may say, ‘Put in troops’ or ‘Put in a peacekeeping force,’ but it is just not as easy as all that, is it? Also there are the dynamics of a Jakarta that is in a little bit of turmoil as well.

Dr Shoemith—The focus is East Timor, and it seems to me that one essential change that would make the East Timorese situation better and more open to the kind of rehabilitation that we are talking about is the removal of the Indonesian army from East Timor. I know about the complexities of that but that is a simple fact, that the problems in East Timor would become manageable and solutions could be found if that factor was removed. I do not think the militia, without the Indonesian armed forces, is an obstacle to the rehabilitation of East Timor.

Senator BROWNHILL—We had people giving an opinion yesterday that the most powerful generals are the ones who have been decorated for work they have done in East Timor in the last year. They are the ones now back in Jakarta in the power play. This is not my opinion; this is what was given to us in evidence yesterday.

Dr Shoemith—There is an article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of 2 September which talks about two generals in the intelligence community who were close to General Prabowo, the son-in-law of Suharto, and how these two generals have now become General Wiranto’s advisers on East Timor. I am sorry, I do not have their names in front of me. They are Major-General Zacky Anwar Makarim and his subordinate. It seems to me very sinister that these two generals who were put in intelligence control of East Timor by General Prabowo are now attached to General Wiranto and are responsible for the military’s intelligence operations in East Timor. Maybe they are the two generals that James Dunn referred to as being located just across the border in West Timor and in fact orchestrating the Indonesian military’s strategies in East Timor. I am not as well informed as some other people here, but a pattern is already emerging in the media and in public comment, such as in that article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, that there appears to be a clear chain of command becoming apparent in Indonesian military operations in East Timor.

Senator BROWNHILL—You also made the point that East Timor, though it may be a basket case, will not asking to be a country that is just existing on aid from foreign countries. How can East Timor be a viable, independent country if it does not have gas fields covered by the Timor Gap Treaty given back to it? Gareth Evans basically said that that was the intent if it ever became independent. Those are words, like preambles and all that sort of thing; they do not actually have real effect until the effect has to be felt. How can they become a viable country without the gas fields?

Dr Shoemith—I do not have expertise in that area. I would imagine that eventually the Australian, Indonesian and East Timorese governments would have to renegotiate the agreement. If not, the Australian government could unilaterally make some arrangement, with an independent East Timor, so that there was a form of compensation for an East Timorese share of those resources. As I say, I am not the person who can offer you expertise on that.

Senator BROWNHILL—What I am trying to paint is a picture. It is just not a simple picture.

Dr Shoemith—Certainly.

Senator BROWNHILL—People are asking for simplistic answers to a very complex question.

Dr Shoemith—This submission, on its own, does not represent any overall solution to the rehabilitation of East Timor. It suggests certain contributions to what we think are important strategic areas of that rehabilitation program. As you say, it can only work if, for example, there is security for the East Timorese people and if, in the longer term, that state becomes economically viable. In becoming economically viable, the Timor Gap resources are an obvious issue. I am sure the East Timorese people themselves would not benefit if they became a state permanently dependent on overseas aid. Some of these proposals were intended to help create a capacity among East Timorese themselves so that they can stand on their own feet in the long term, if the other factors are right.

Senator BROWNHILL—The United Nations is hanging on by their fingernails at the moment. Do you have any faith that they can administer articles 7 and 6 of the agreement that was signed between the foreign ministers of Portugal and Indonesia and Secretary-General of the United Nations?

Dr Shoemith—I do not have that 5 May agreement in front of me. Could you quickly tell me what those articles say?

Senator BROWNHILL—Article 7 says:

During the interim period between the conclusion of the popular consultation and the start of the implementation of either option—

that means independence or autonomy—

the parties request the Secretary-General to maintain an adequate United Nations presence in East Timor.

Article 6 says that if the Secretary-General determines:

... in accordance with this Agreement, that the proposed constitutional framework for special autonomy is not acceptable to the East Timorese people, the Government of Indonesia shall take the constitutional steps necessary to terminate its links with East Timor—

and it goes on to say that the parties to the agreement:

... shall agree on arrangements for a peaceful and orderly transfer of authority in East Timor to the United Nations. The Secretary-General shall, subject to the appropriate legislative mandate, initiate the procedure enabling East Timor to begin a process of transition towards independence.

I do not know how those two articles are handled now, but there are very sore fingernails, I would say.

Dr Shoemith—If the Indonesian army were not a factor, there would still be very large problems in that transition period. The UN was involved in Cambodia, where the Khmer

Rouge were one of the four parties involved in the Supreme Council that was supposed to represent Cambodian authority in an interim period. It did not work. I would agree that in an interim period, even with the Indonesian army not in the picture, it is quite difficult because of the violence and other political factors. But I think it is possible for a transition period to lead to a normalisation, although it would take time. Some of the transition arrangements may require a curtailment of East Timorese political freedom in the first step in the sense that there may be a necessity for the United Nations to impose a kind of freeze on things. Then, as rehabilitation projects proceed and the situation improves, a next phase would come where political parties could operate again. Then there would have to be national elections at the end of the process, somewhere along the line, to form a government of an independent East Timor.

Senator BROWNHILL—That is a question I asked yesterday. Of course, if the people who voted for independence are now refugees in other countries, and the country is being resettled by other persons, you might get a completely different reflection on the referendum vote in a general election. It is a complex issue—that is really all I am trying to say. It is complex and you cannot simplistically give answers to it, which you say you have not tried to do; neither can we, neither can governments and neither, maybe, can the United Nations, but I believe the United Nations are the linchpin.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Dr Shoemith, I briefly touched on this question when I interrupted you earlier, and I thank you for accepting that, but I want to be clear on the zone of cooperation. The three producing fields, the Bayu-Undan, Sunset and Elang, are all within the zone of cooperation that is administered jointly by Indonesia and Australia, but if you were to extrapolate those on pre-1975 boundaries they would all fall within the old Portuguese exclusive economic zone. We assume that international law will apply and they will now go back to East Timor.

The evidence we have had with respect to that is that they will supply more royalties from that—in the near future, not immediately—than even the coffee crop, which is the biggest export earner for East Timor, supplies. I imagine a lot of the \$30 million to \$40 million that it costs Indonesia to ‘administer’ East Timor goes into the armed services but, assuming that it does not and assuming there is going to be a per capita spending, it is going to cost some tens of millions of dollars at least for any administration to re-establish some semblance of an administrative organisation there and to rebuild it. Where do you think that should come from? If it is not Portugal—and we hear nothing, or very little, of Portugal as its former masters—where do you think that should come from? Should it come from Portugal?

Dr Shoemith—I would imagine that there should be an international effort to raise development aid so that for an interim period the international community would financially support the rehabilitation of East Timor.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Through the United Nations, I imagine?

Dr Shoemith—Yes. There would have to be, I suppose, a process of international negotiation about the East Timorese people’s access to the marine resources that they have inherited from Portugal. I am not an international lawyer, but at a commonsense level, if

East Timor's independence is achieved, I suppose under international law East Timor inherits the marine resources that were in the domain of the Portuguese colony.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But you are implying that independence from Indonesia means independence per se, when the probability of that, in my view, is rather remote. At least for a very short period, the administration would have to go back to Portugal and then to a full independence. Can you comment on that?

Dr Shoemith—No, I really cannot predict what the steps are. We could discuss the scenarios and how they would fit in with international law but I suppose, to be honest, the events of the last nine days have knocked some of us flat. When you re-visit the 5 May agreement between Portugal and Indonesia under the UN auspices, a lot of it is obviously out of date now. The challenge will be in this coming period to develop new international instruments for East Timor's economic viability and international rights. That is too speculative for me to try and answer.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Why do you think Australia is so up-front up at the pointy end of all the international countries that are showing concern for Indonesia, when there are other areas such as Aceh and Kalimantan where we are not?

Dr Shoemith—I can think of two responses. One is a moral responsibility.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—As a result of? We have a responsibility in Aceh, the Mollucas and Kalimantan too, do we not?

Dr Shoemith—We have a particular responsibility because of our dealings with Jakarta over the last two decades which involve East Timor. The second response is a hard-nosed one and that is that, particularly living here in Darwin, one is acutely aware that Australia's northern frontier is in a threatening environment. I suppose you could say, particularly now with the Indonesian system—

Senator LIGHTFOOT—It is threatening or is it threatened?

Dr Shoemith—It is threatening.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Who or what is our northern environment threatening?

Dr Shoemith—From the point of view of Australia, we have a northern frontier which is largely made up of Indonesia, which historically has been a threatening frontier because of the nature of Australian history. It would seem to me that a central strategic concern of Canberra would be that the immediate northern environment was an area of political stability and development.

In that sense, a viable developing East Timor is in our national interest. More fundamentally, it is in the interests of the East Timorese people to live in a free and developing environment but, from our point of view, from both a humanitarian and a national strategic point of view it makes sense that East Timor becomes viable and gets on its feet.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I understand. I am switching backwards and forwards to solutions—and I go back to the genesis of the problem now. Why do you think there was a failure by Indonesia to absorb East Timor into the most populous and the longest archipelago in the world, given that the other 20,000-odd islands seem to be working somewhat reasonably well, given the disparity, the distances, the cultural differences and so on? Are we looking at something akin to Northern Ireland as a sectarian issue? Is it something like Sri Lanka or other areas in the world where there are sectarian or religious differences? Is that the problem?

Dr Shoemith—The way I would approach it would be to look at the nature of the Indonesian state which took over East Timor. It was an authoritarian state system where the military were a key actor and where respect for human rights and cultural sensitivities and so on in Indonesia itself were not developed. The nature of that state as the authority that took over East Timor meant that not only were East Timorese sensibilities and sense of separate identity confronted, but they had imposed on them a Jakarta system which was unaccountable and quite often brutal. In a sense, the Indonesians themselves contributed to this strong resistance to their authority in East Timor by the nature of the Indonesian state that took over.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—It does not happen and we do not show any concern—let me rephrase that. We show, by comparison, very little concern for, say, Myanmar, formerly Burma, where the same thing is going on on a macro scale. What is the difference? Is it because they are closer to us?

Dr Shoemith—I am concerned about Myanmar.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But you do not read about it in the media very often.

Dr Shoemith—Obviously, the media makes decisions about newsworthiness and I would think that the saturation coverage of East Timor reflects the fact that it is a vital issue for Australia. Myanmar, on a human rights level and on other levels, should be a matter of long-term concern as well to Australia.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes, but I am asking you why it is not. It does not appear to be.

Dr Shoemith—I think one obvious simple answer to that is distance.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes.

Dr Shoemith—If Myanmar was where East Timor is—I am sorry to be too simple about this—I think Myanmar would get saturation coverage.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Out of sight, out of mind—is that the expression that comes to mind?

Dr Shoemith—Yes.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Just one more question because of the constraints of time, Dr Shoesmith, and I just go back to Portugal again. Portugal has not played a large part. At least if one scans the media, one does not see Portugal playing a large part. Should Portugal play a larger part and should it be somewhat chastised for not being up at the sharp end of the situation as Australia is?

Dr Shoesmith—There are indications that the Portuguese people are quite highly concerned about the situation in East Timor.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—How is that reflected? How is that manifested?

Dr Shoesmith—In public demonstrations of concern—there was a massive public demonstration of concern in Lisbon I think a day or two ago. I would expect that, if the conditions allowed, Portugal should and would play a major part in the rehabilitation of East Timor.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But we have heard where New Zealand is coming in. America has got ships here in Darwin. Australia, of course, and Britain and other countries have put in plans for assistance with respect to evacuation and the rehabilitation of post-independence East Timor, but one hears very little about Portugal. Where are the evacuation aircraft, the ships or other facilities?

Dr Shoesmith—I do not know what approaches have been made to Lisbon via Canberra, for example.

Senator BROWNHILL—They should not have to make approaches.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes, that was my point. Thank you very much, Dr Shoesmith.

CHAIR—We are over time, but there is one issue I want to raise with you as you are in education. A number of East Timorese have settled in, say, Darwin over a period of time, and they would have had access to our education processes, I would imagine. Do you see any of those coming through the tertiary education processes in the Northern Territory at this stage? If you cannot answer this, could you take it on notice. I would be interested.

Dr Shoesmith—I have had students from the East Timorese community successfully gain a bachelor of arts degree in recent years, for example.

CHAIR—I am leading you. Obviously, I want it on the record for certain purposes. With the East Timorese who have previously settled here and who have had access to our education processes and obtained BAs and, I would assume, other degrees as well, what is the real likelihood that, given the establishment of a safe environment in East Timor—and that is always taken as understood—those people are likely to want to go back to East Timor? Have they expressed a view to you about that? Or is it more likely that those people will now remain in Australia? What role could they play in going back?

Dr Shoesmith—If there was security there and then the rehabilitation process proceeded and there were all sorts of initiatives taken to get an independent East Timor on its feet, then

I think that there would be many East Timorese who had education in Australia who would be more than willing to go back and contribute to that. I think their contribution would be vital because there will be a great need for trained and educated people in that process in East Timor. People who are East Timorese, who obtain that training and education, would become a key human resource in the actual process of rehabilitation. I would even like to see the Australian government facilitate that, because one of the decisions that an East Timorese person with an education here would have to make is that they would be prepared to make sacrifices, but that they would have to have a position and an income. If you went back to Dili, let us say to work as a civil servant or as a teacher, after a long time in Australia, you would have responsibilities here. If you resettled back in Dili, you would have responsibilities and so—

CHAIR—Some of those people are now first generation Australian citizens of East Timorese extraction.

Dr Shoesmith—That is right.

CHAIR—Which makes them reluctant to go back.

Dr Shoesmith—Certainly. But you could have programs such as secondment programs and contract programs for East Timorese people from Australia to contribute to East Timor for a three- or five-year period. In other words, it could not be either one thing or another—that is, resettling back in East Timor or staying here. You could actually tap that human resource of East Timorese in Australia through a variety of those sorts of programs.

CHAIR—That is what I wanted to raise. Thank you for answering that question for me and for your submission here today. We have appreciated the evidence that you have given to the committee.

Proceedings suspended from 10.19 a.m. to 10.30 a.m.

SPILLETT, Mr Peter Gerald (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I welcome Mr Peter Spillett. In what capacity do you appear before the committee today?

Mr Spillett—I am an honorary research fellow with the Museum of Arts and Science, Darwin. I am also an honorary research fellow at the University of Northern Territory. Also, I am attached to the University of Nusa Cendana in Kupang and the University of East Timor in Dili.

CHAIR—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but should you at any stage wish to give any part of your evidence in private, you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. The committee has before it your submission. Are there any alterations or additions you would like to make to your submission at this stage?

Mr Spillett—There is one passage which I am concerned with. I would like to be advised on that later. I think it has been discussed. I might just make a preliminary preamble.

CHAIR—Yes, we will come to that in a moment. I think the view of the committee—and I have not discussed it with my colleagues—is that there is no concern. We believe they should be taken on your part. It is nothing different from what we receive from a lot of people who submit things.

Mr Spillett—Darwin is a small community.

CHAIR—There is a diversity of views. We accept the diversity of views. There is a great degree of tolerance on the part of a Senate committee in accepting a wide and disparate range of views. We see the passage that you have concern with as providing no problem.

The committee has agreed to the publication of your submission in a separate volume. I now invite you to make an opening statement and then we will proceed to questions.

Mr Spillett—Thank you for giving me the opportunity today to provide some evidence regarding some of the problems experienced by the Timorese people. It has been some seven years since I made my first submission regarding Australia's relations with Indonesia. It has also been six months since I first made my submission to your committee in relation to the inquiry into East Timor. Sadly, since that time, the situation has changed dramatically.

I am mindful that, to resolve an existing problem, the original causes of the problem have to be identified and analysed and, where possible, solutions have to be found to resolve the issues. Through my research in Timor of the past seven years and from personal contact with people throughout the island, it appears that there are two significant factors which have contributed to the enmity between the people. The first is the border created by the Dutch and the Portuguese in 1860. Before that time, there were a number of enclaves of Portuguese influence in western Timor and enclaves of Dutch influence in eastern Timor, and there was normal intercourse between tribes throughout the island. One major kingdom situated in

central Timor had great influence in the early 17th century throughout the island—the Kingdom of Wewiku Wehali. The people of this kingdom spread out through the eastern parts of the island, taking with them their language of Tetum, their culture and families, which intermarried with smaller local tribes. With the introduction of the border, Portuguese and Dutch animosities filtered down to their subject peoples. Tribes and families were separated. Ironically, with the integration of eastern Timor into Indonesia, there emerged a reunited Timor with a consequent freedom of movement throughout the island.

The second problem was that, having lived under the Portuguese colonial rule for some 300 years, some of the indigenous Timor people felt that, with independence, nothing would change. Even allowing for the 25 years of Indonesian rule, the people believed that at independence the situation would revert to the supremacy of the Portuguese and mixed race Portuguese—that is, European culture versus Timor culture.

I have tried to raise my concerns both with the local and southern press over the past year and, despite interviews and statements made, no-one has ever presented the other side of the story. I also raised these concerns in my 1992 submission at the time of the inquiry into East Timor. In April of this year I also expressed my grave concerns at the rapidly deteriorating situation in Timor in a letter to DFAT, but to date I have not received an acknowledgment of that letter.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Thank you very much, Mr Spillett. You say in your submission to the committee that the majority of indigenous people on Timor are represented in East Timor—that is, the majority of the original people of Timor are still represented in a majority in East Timor. Is that correct?

Mr Spillett—They are. Through the Indonesian government, through the propriety of the councils, there are representatives of a number of peoples there—not based on culture or anything like that.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But do they form the majority, the original—

Mr Spillett—I believe the majority of people in East Timor are the indigenous people.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Why is it that they voted overwhelmingly for independence, do you think?

Mr Spillett—I believe they were influenced by the later activities of the Besi Merah Putih.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Who are?

Mr Spillett—I believe that those people who were interested in working with Indonesia, their relationships with Indonesia, these people who culturally have it, their connection with West Timor, may have been influenced at the last by the atrocities and attacks that were

being made. They then felt—I can only assume this; I do not know for sure—that they should join this one voice to get this.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—As a protest?

Mr Spillett—As a protest, I suppose, would be that, or to join this—‘Here is a chance.’ After all, they have been ill-treated by the army, all of them, irrespective, and I suppose this would be a joining of that, to try to shed all of that. I think those concerns will still be there.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Do you imply that had the atrocities not been committed—that are still being committed—that there would be a unified Timor rather than one that has voted to be separate?

Mr Spillett—I think that would have been a better situation.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Do you say that would have been a better situation from your perspective, or do you say that would have been a better situation based on the evidence and the discussions you have had with East Timorese people—native to the area, of course?

Mr Spillett—During my research when I have visited throughout the whole of Timor, these two concerns I have mentioned are there, and there was relief when this talk of a united Timor came back. I lectured in Dili and Kupang with some response from the people that they liked the idea of a united Timor—in other words, similar to Ireland; that here part of the community wanted independence or separation and the others wanted to be reunited with their own ancestral people.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—As a result of colonisation through the Portuguese and the Dutch, there is not just a cultural difference that has evolved over the last two or three centuries but also, as a result of the influx of people from all over the world, an ethnic difference in East Timor that is not as pronounced as it is in West Timor. Is that correct?

Mr Spillett—There has always been contact from the other islands, like Alor and Flores, as well. The difference has been that possibly the West Timorese have been under the control of Indonesia longer and that it is far more stable. You see all these people coming into West Timor now, fleeing or being pushed out—whichever way you see it. In 1975 they moved from East Timor into West Timor. They feel safe there. It is rather ironic.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—What I am trying to get at is that, because of colonisation, there are people from various backgrounds—Semitic, negroid, Malayan other than bahasa Malay, Aryan Indian, non-Aryan Indian, caucasians and so on—in East Timor who are not represented, at least to the same degree, in West Timor. Is that correct?

Mr Spillett—I would say that it would be more so in West Timor than in East Timor.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—So it would be more ethnically diverse in West Timor than in East Timor?

Mr Spillett—Yes.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—What then would be the main people in East Timor? What is their ethnic background? Could you describe the various groups?

Mr Spillett—The kingdom I mentioned before originated from what is now West Timor. They are the bahasa Tetun speaking people and, as they moved throughout eastern Timor, they took their culture and language with them and intermarried with the smaller ethnic groups. Some have come from other islands and we do not yet know the origins of others.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—What is the main group that is left in East Timor? Are they Malay? They are certainly not Aryan—or maybe they are Aryan. I am asking you.

Mr Spillett—I am not a linguist, as such, although I speak the language—I suppose we would call it Austronesian.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—They are significantly different from the islands of Sumatra and Java?

Mr Spillett—Definitely.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Could you tell the committee how different they are?

Mr Spillett—The language is entirely different. I think that the other languages are entirely different from Javanese or Sumatran. I think they are unique to Timor.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Culturally, as a result of that, are they widely different from the major islands of Sumatra and Java?

Mr Spillett—Yes, definitely. You are looking at the whole of Timor, not just East Timor.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes. How then was it ever possible to integrate Timor as an island with the rest of Indonesia, given the size of the rest of Indonesia and Timor? Was it possible to ever integrate it successfully?

Mr Spillett—The same thing could be said for all of the islands. That was the whole purpose—there were some 7,000 islands, all with their own language and culture, and they have managed to do that.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But aren't the major islands significantly Malay?

Mr Spillett—I cannot really answer that one. I think not. Certainly Java, and the origin of Indonesian is bahasa Malay.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes.

Mr Spillett—Some were like Irian Jaya and some of the other eastern islands would not come within that.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Given the other successful integration—success is based on greater or lesser—there was no problem with the integration of Timor into the whole of the Indonesian archipelago, notwithstanding its difference in ethnicity?

Mr Spillett—No. I would say that, ethnically, they are certainly more associated with West Timor and that area of Savu and Roti and the other islands.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Given that the length of the island of Timor is 350 or 400 kilometres, or around about that, do you think a divided Timor is the best thing for that area—for the people of Timor?

Mr Spillett—It is very hard for me to say this but from what I have seen and heard from talking to the people, I think that culturally they are far more aligned to the west. It is part of it.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—When you say ‘the west’, do you mean West Timor?

Mr Spillett—West Timor. Before that border, there were 50-odd kingdoms throughout Timor.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—So, in your long experience in that part of the world, do you think that West Timor and East Timor will settle down and learn to live with each other, given that they will have a frontier that divides their island?

Mr Spillett—In the last few years, I have seen the relationship between east and west growing better and better. There has been a deliberate promotion of culture, dancing and music between the two sides and the taking of competitions of dancers and actors, or whatever it might be, into West Timor and from West Timor into East Timor and the promotion of the culture of the Timor people—the ethnic Timor people.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—How do you feel now about the situation of East Timor going back to Portugal, even if only briefly, to give it its full independence? Do you feel that is a good and proper thing for it to do in the interests of the people of Timor generally, or in the interests of the people of East Timor less generally?

Mr Spillett—I am sure it would be opposed. We are looking at a very volatile situation where things could change tomorrow or the next day. Even allowing for that, sure, there would be certain people who would welcome that back. Despite the ill treatment of the Timor people by the Portuguese, there are still descendants of the Portuguese and the mixed race Portuguese who do not know history and what has caused certain problems. I think that would be one thing. With what is going on now—this highly emotional thing—they might pluck at that as one way of being helped. I do not think it would help the situation generally because so many people are still anti-Portuguese because of what took place and I do not think they would feel comfortable at all with that influence.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Do you see an East Timor that successfully separates from Indonesia living in harmony and peace ad infinitum? I know that is a big ask and you need a crystal ball. But do you think that it is a probability, or is it only a remote possibility?

Mr Spillett—Can I just make one comment, please?

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Please.

Mr Spillett—When it was decided there should be a vote and that the United Nations would conduct it in a democratic way, you are talking to people who are tribally—what shall we say?—in a reasonably unsophisticated situation. The meaning of democracy, even in Jakarta, is not known. How can you expect people working in the fields—who, up until very recently, had no education and still cannot read or write—to understand the Western concept of democracy? It was made quite clear that they had to vote, and the vote was for that. But that does not mean to say that they know what democracy is or, as we would say, the fact that if you have an election the loser accepts the outcome in the hope that the next one will be good. In Indonesia, that would not be so. The loser would not accept the situation, and that has been so right through their history.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—So do you think that the act of independence for East Timor is premature?

Mr Spillett—I believe so.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Do you think that it was a major mistake?

Mr Spillett—I do.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Do you think that Dr Habibie made a fundamental error in speaking of independence for East Timor?

Mr Spillett—I believe so. I think, if it was going to be independent, then it should have a transitional period of education. If we take the British formula, I think that is a good guide. With the independence of Malaysia or India there was a chance for the people to gradually come up and take their positions with that aim in mind—to educate the people, train them in administration and management and government and so on—and, when they were ready for it, they elected their own parliament and the flag was pulled down and the other one was put up. This has been traumatic.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—From whom or what did the main impetus, the thrust for independence, come?

Mr Spillett—I can only give you my own personal feelings. From 1975 onwards when many people, refugees, came to Australia, particularly into Darwin, there was natural animosity. They wanted to express their feelings of freedom.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Natural animosity. Between whom?

Mr Spillett—The Indonesians, and there was also the tribal one, if you like—the pro independents and those who wanted to remain with Portugal and those who wanted amalgamation and so on. This came out into Australia—‘Independence; must have independence.’ This spread throughout Australia and, being Australian, we wanted

democracy for those people. So in actual fact what we have been trying to do is to press democracy onto a people who are not geared for it, who know nothing whatsoever about it, and I think that this movement, over 25 years, has conditioned the Australian people that they need, that they must have democracy, without knowing the problems concerned in this matter of a diversity of a European culture within Timor and the native culture.

And so, whether it be the unions that say, 'You have got to have it,' or the pro independence people who say, 'You have got to have it,' there has become this particular theme. I have tried to make my concerns felt through the press that there is another point of view. Never has anything come out of it. Hence my submission that there is another side that should be considered.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—How damaging do you think that the movement that Australia has backed for independence for East Timor has been with respect to the relationship between Australia and the Indonesian government?

Mr Spillett—We have witnessed a growing appreciation that the relationship, I think, between Indonesia and Australia is a very good one. People travel from all over Australia into Indonesia. We were highly regarded in Indonesia. The Indonesian people have a lot of respect for Australians and their views, education and so on, but I think that it came to the situation that the angst from the people who came out of Timor in 1975 grew and burgeoned and went in with the other people who really did not know what was going on or what the situation was in Timor. They ignored that, and that has brought about this situation. That is my feeling.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—The relationship between Australia and Indonesia is not irreparable, is it? It is something that—

Mr Spillett—I sincerely hope not. I have the utmost regard for—I will not mention governments—the people of Indonesia themselves who are extremely friendly and amenable, and I enjoy my time in Timor and throughout Indonesia. I am always received with courtesy and respect.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I have one more question, Mr Spillett. You have been very generous with your answers—and the chairman has been very generous with my time, as usual. What do the Indonesian people think of Australia's stance? Are they disillusioned, are they surprised, are they not surprised? Could you describe the—

Mr Spillett—I cannot say because this has appeared very quickly. I have not had a chance to talk with anybody that would know that situation. I have grave fears that the focus is not just on East Timor but on the matter of the unity of Indonesia itself.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—And that is dangerous for the stability of the area.

Mr Spillett—It certainly is. I have feelings based on some knowledge and based on some comment that there is a power struggle going on in Jakarta with the probability of a coup.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—And that would mean General Wiranto as a—

CHAIR—Would you like a glass of water, Mr Spillett?

Mr Spillett—I am sorry.

Senator BOURNE—It is a difficult time for anyone.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—We all feel like that.

CHAIR—I think Mr Spillett feels grief because he is obviously very close to the East and West Timorese people. He feels this very strongly.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—May I say how very much I have appreciated your contribution, Mr Spillett, to the Senate committee. I do not have any more questions that I feel prepared to ask but I appreciate and understand that this is a particularly emotive time for you. I do appreciate the contribution that you have made.

Mr Spillett—Thank you very much. I do have many friends in both camps. I do not know where they are. At least I know that one of them is in the compound.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—We certainly hope that this stops and that your friends are safe.

Mr Spillett—Can I just mention that this is not printed yet. I have not got a publisher for it yet; I am looking for one. But that is the fruits of my research on which I base my knowledge.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Is this the one that Bishop Belo has a copy of?

Mr Spillett—Yes, but, as I explained to him, it had not been edited; it was not complete. He was very interested in it. He took it away and read it and he wanted to keep it. I explained to him it was not finished. It had no comments, no analysis, nothing.

CHAIR—So, is it finished now?

Mr Spillett—Yes; with analysis. It is all there. I do not know what the situation is. I would seek your advice. I would be quite happy to make a copy available. But it is copyright, and I would not want people picking bits and pieces out of it.

CHAIR—Selectively.

Senator BROWNHILL—Can I just make the comment that the future belongs to those who prepare for it. But you cannot prepare for your future unless you remember your past.

Mr Spillett—Exactly.

Senator BROWNHILL—And that is what you are putting together here.

Mr Spillett—I am saying that, and I am an historian.

Senator BROWNHILL—You are the first witness who has really come in and talked a lot about the past. First of all, I get the inference that you are basically saying that the Australians for a Free East Timor—not them specifically—and people who are outside the country have specifically pressured too hard for a free East Timor and an independent East Timor, if you like. You said in your submission that the withdrawal of troops would be the removal of one of the main reasons for the cry for independence. I would like your comments on those two points. The third point that you might like to comment on is the bad timing for the referendum with the events that have gone on in Indonesia.

Mr Spillett—I will just make some comment, if I may. The United Nations personnel are very dedicated and helpful people, but the system itself is possibly the largest bureaucracy in the world. When I met some of the United Nations people in East Timor, they had not the slightest idea. First of all, one man said he did not know where Timor was. The others knew nothing whatsoever about the cultural differences or any background at all. I can understand that. They were sort of on the wrong foot to start with. To me, there was such a sensitive issue going on that it should have been treated with far more understanding of the situation. Sorry—your other questions were?

Senator BROWNHILL—Let us continue in that vein. Obviously, you have made a comment about the United Nations sending people into an area without giving them full briefings and an understanding of what they are on about when they go into the area.

Mr Spillett—Exactly.

Senator BROWNHILL—It is quite a big bureaucracy which is pretty slow to move. Obviously, it is not moving all that fast at the moment and it only moves apparently with the concurrence of the United States of America. It does not really move as a group as the United Nations. My other question concerned the bad timing of the referendum and that is because they did not understand the—

Mr Spillett—This is the pressure to have something done, and to show you have got to have freedom whether you like it or not—I am sorry, but that is how I feel. There was not enough research done on it or on the consequences.

Senator BROWNHILL—And the consequences of whether East Timor would have the ability to be self-sufficient as an independent country without the gas supplies.

Mr Spillett—Always in East Timor when I am on the campus I have the students saying to me, ‘But we have got oil in the ground.’ I try to explain you just do not take it out of the ground and put it into your motor. There is a lot of money spent in exploitation and exploration and, if you get that kind of money coming in from outside, there can also be a certain amount of pressure and corruption. In a small country, that will be a big issue.

Senator BROWNHILL—Can I just ask that other question again: had the military withdrawn from East Timor, would that have meant that there would have been a different

date as far as independence is concerned? Maybe Senator Bourne might comment on this because she was there, of course, during the ballot.

Mr Spillett—Would there have been a different vote, do you mean?

Senator BROWNHILL—Yes, would there have been?

Mr Spillett—I think there would have been—and this is what I have been pushing for ages to get. If the military had come out of Timor and been replaced with competent police in riot control or something like that, I believe that these people who were pro-integration were there but I think they were hijacked or coerced and encouraged to become Besi Merah Putih. It is only a recent phenomenon. That is, I think, one of the problems. Whether they were paid or coerced I do not know, but I do not believe that to be the feeling of the real people who want integration with West Timor.

Senator BOURNE—Can I ask about something completely different in your submission? You mention the Politeknik at Hera, which we have not heard very much about at all in this, and we are interested in where Australia could send aid in in the future.

Mr Spillett—Yes, I think I can just explain a bit. I think it was financed from Austria. The Politeknik provides higher education. The university itself, I understand, is looking to moving out of Dili which has been always a focal point for demonstrations, so you have this problem with education. The Politeknik is a very good one. It is quieter and it is some way out of town. There are certain problems there from time to time but, generally speaking, it is operating well. I cannot say the same thing for the university because a number of the tutors are foreigners. When I say foreigners, they might come from Bali, from West Timor or from Flores. Even the students will not accept the decisions or the directions of the tutors. They say, 'Oh, pendatang'—new arrivals—and will not accept direction.

Senator BOURNE—That is interesting. In your opinion, what would happen in the future if education is set up again, which it will obviously have to be no matter what, and there is no expertise in East Timor to teach things like medicine and law and that sort of thing? In your opinion, what would happen if former East Timorese people who have been refugees and have learnt these things went back and tried to teach in the university or the Politeknik? Would they be treated the same way, do you think?

Mr Spillett—No, I think they would be part of the process, if you like. But how many East Timorese who are in employment and have a house and a car would want to go back and live in those conditions? They could only be paid the ruling wage over there which is quite different from here.

Senator BOURNE—I think we would have to look at that whole structure.

Mr Spillett—Certainly, the problem with the university is that it is a church university, but all the appointments of the rector have been scrutinised by the army.

Senator BOURNE—Which, as you said, has always been one of the problems.

Mr Spillett—There are some very good people who have come out. One, in particular, I know was formerly acting rector of the university—Armando Maya. He has a great deal of knowledge and understanding of the situation. He went to, I think, the States to do his doctorate and he is back there again. There are some people with a reasonable knowledge of education standards and what we know as democracy.

Senator BOURNE—Yes, and who could teach and we would hope will be able to in the future.

Mr Spillett—Yes.

Senator BOURNE—Thank you.

CHAIR—I just have a couple of questions. I read your submission with interest. I think yours is one of the few that has gone not into recent history but into the past. I will read a couple of comments from your submission and then ask you to comment on those:

One of the problems is the matter of the Portuguese descendants and the Mestico or mixed race Portuguese which, because of their earlier power and control, view the present situation in the same light as their ancestors.

Then you go on to say, on the next page:

Until there is a greater understanding of the situation in Timor, and the indigenous people are involved in all matters relating to the future of their land and welfare and secure equal human rights, there will never be peace and justice in the island. Civil war will be the norm.

The view that I have formed from reading what you have said is that there is a deep history there of a class society which has grown up whereby there is a ruling class—

Mr Spillett—The elite.

CHAIR—An elite. Some of those now would be people who are absorbed into and active in the militia, I would presume. Is that a fair assessment?

Mr Spillett—I would think so, yes.

CHAIR—It would be a fair assessment. But it seems to me your conclusion is that something has to be done about some of the underlying subcultural problems. Withdrawing the Indonesian troops and getting rid of those elements of the militia who have been imported from West Timor is only part of the peace process, as you seem to explain it. It seems to me that there is another subcultural antagonism there as well. Is that correct?

Mr Spillett—Yes, it is still there. It is a case of, I think, this elite, whether they realise it or not, sidelining the indigenous people.

CHAIR—The other point you make in your submission—and I would ask you to comment on this—is:

However, manipulation and corruption by a few inexperienced, naive people, in a new government could lead to big problems.

What do you mean by that?

Mr Spillett—What page is that?

CHAIR—It is in the second last paragraph on page 4.

Mr Spillett—We are dealing with people who, as I say, have little knowledge of the outside world. I think they have had good tutors with the Indonesian Army and, therefore, if there is money going, it is a natural thing in any community to go for the next dollar to improve our living standards or to give us the things we have always wanted. Therefore, the collusion could be with approving of rights within the country for a consideration. It happens throughout Indonesia. That is one of the things, I suppose, that the Timor people have inherited.

CHAIR—At page 7 of your submission, in the second last paragraph, you say:

I do not believe that Australian 'peacekeeping' troops would be a positive step.

What is your view there?

Mr Spillett—The feeling could well be that, because of the agreement between the two armed forces, the military going in could be misconstrued as working together with the Indonesian Army.

CHAIR—It has been put to me, not by a witness before this committee but by a person whose opinion I would respect, that it may well be best that Australia did not participate in a peacekeeping force with the military. It may well be that where we have sent in the AFP in CIVPOL and so on is an area where we have respect. We may be treading on dangerous ground if we introduce Australian soldiers into East Timor.

Mr Spillett—I believe that would be the case.

CHAIR—Do you think that the East Timorese people would be able to discern the difference between Australian Federal Police as part of a United Nations peacekeeping force and the Australian military? One of the things that undoubtedly is going to be confronting the Australian government is that, if the United Nations take a decision to put in a peacekeeping force very shortly—and we hope they do—the Australian government has already indicated a willingness to participate in that peacekeeping force. It seems to me what you are saying is that a peacekeeping force would be best constituted by nations other than Australia in terms of straight military, and that we would probably make the best contribution by sending in the Australian Federal Police as part of the United Nations force. Is that a reasonable deduction?

Mr Spillett—I would certainly say I agree with that. I am not quite sure how the police would be received at this time. Generally I would say, 'Yes, that is great'. Under the present circumstances of the situation, I think that could also be antagonistic.

CHAIR—In respect of East Timor and West Timor, you spoke about the boundary that was created there about 150 years ago and, as I understood from your submission, the boundary has changed on a number of occasions.

Mr Spillett—No, just on that one time.

CHAIR—Just once, all right. How strong is the desire for there to be some form of unification between East Timor and West Timor?

Mr Spillett—From the reaction that I received when I gave a couple of lectures in Dili and Kupang, there was not really any opposition to it. They felt that that was reasonable and the right outcome of it.

CHAIR—But was that as part of Indonesia or as part of an independent Timor?

Mr Spillett—I could not mention there being an independent Timor. But certainly that was from the people I knew reasonably well within Timor itself because of the gradual build-up of relationships and strengthening of those ties.

CHAIR—Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we will need to stop there, Mr Spillett. We thank you for your appearance before the committee.

Mr Spillett—Thank you very much.

[11.16 a.m.]

FISHER, Mr William Alford, Committee Member, Campaign for an Independent East Timor

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but should you at any stage wish to give any part of your evidence in private you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. The committee has before it your submission. Are there any alterations or additions you would like to make to it at this stage?

Mr Fisher—No alterations or additions.

CHAIR—You have indicated that there is an additional submission that you have tendered to the committee today.

Mr Fisher—Yes. I put in a submission in April and I have today put in a further submission as a supplement to that in light of recent developments and of my own visit to East Timor.

CHAIR—The committee has made your first submission public. It has not, at this stage, made your supplementary submission public. Subject to the normal scrutiny by the committee, it will be made a public document if there is no objection by the committee. I now invite you to make an opening statement and then we will proceed to questions.

Mr Fisher—I will very quickly outline the submission that I put in today. It was written in the last few days so it takes account of some events of the last few days but not very recent events.

CHAIR—Can you state for the record—and this may help us in listening to your submission—if you have been to East Timor in recent times?

Mr Fisher—Yes, I was in East Timor during August. My additional submission deals with two issues. One is Australian aid, which I see as very definitely having been a hesitant step in the right direction, but unfortunately it has been outweighed by events and also by a tendency for a lot of foreign policy analysts to want to continue with business as usual.

I have drawn attention to the case of Lansell Taudevin, the head of AusAID's work in East Timor. To me, AusAID's work represents a very definite step in the right direction and a very good indication for future Australian policy in East Timor. However, the treatment of Lansell Taudevin was definitely not in Australia's interests as I see them. Lansell was brought back to Australia as a result of militia threats to Australian personnel—all AusAID workers were withdrawn. He was then told he would never work in East Timor again. His main crime seems to have been that for months, in the course of his work, he had been informing the Australian government that sections of the Indonesian army were training and arming militias in East Timor that were intended to cause trouble. For this he was ignored and sacked. This is definitely not the way Australian policy should go. I regard that as definitely a retrograde step.

The other section I deal with in the additional submission is Australian policy, past and present. It is mainly dealing with the very current situation. As I state at the start of the section, ethnic cleansing is happening now in East Timor. There is not too much doubt about this. People are being forcibly transferred to West Timor and also to other parts of Indonesia, other islands, which is extremely alarming. It is being called ethnic cleansing by Dr Kevin Baker, who was desperately trying to cope with 12,000 refugees at his Dili clinic. He explains that this is being done because they see these people as lesser people. I can agree with that assessment. I spoke to many Indonesians—West Timorese, Javanese and others—while I was in East Timor and West Timor recently and I found that, without exception, they have very racist attitudes towards the East Timorese. This ethnic cleansing is a systematic policy. It is being carried out—

CHAIR—If I can just stop you there, are you saying racism is endemic within the society?

Mr Fisher—Unfortunately, yes. It has become obvious—

CHAIR—I am not talking about in the last five years. This is something historic, is it?

Mr Fisher—I would not describe it as long-term historic, but certainly since East Timor was invaded all information about East Timor that has come out to the wider Indonesia seems to have portrayed these racist stereotypes of East Timorese quite thoroughly. In fact, the Indonesian public unfortunately is very misinformed about the situation in East Timor. That is becoming quite apparent from comments by Indonesian people and media commentators in Indonesia now.

CHAIR—Pardon my ignorance on this, but is there a class structure within West Timor, with an elite and a lower class? Is it pronounced? Is it prevalent?

Mr Fisher—Yes, it is quite pronounced.

CHAIR—In West, not East?

Mr Fisher—In West Timor, yes. I think it is very unfortunate that the Indonesian people are so misinformed about East Timor. It is definitely going to be a problem for Australian foreign policy because the Indonesian people are probably staunchly behind the Indonesian government on its East Timor policy as a result of misinformation.

CHAIR—I am sorry to have interrupted you. You may proceed.

Mr Fisher—Andrew McNaughtan said yesterday the militias are children. I can vouch for that. I have observed the situation there and most of the militias are kids. There is a hard core, of course, of violent and unpredictable adults, but most of the militias would melt into nothing in the face of a determined international force. They would not be a real problem to an international force.

The main culprits for what is going on in East Timor now are Zacky Anwar and Colonel Noer Muis. Nominally, Noer Muis is the military commander in East Timor, but Zacky

Anwar is the intelligence liaison officer for TNI, which is the Indonesia army, and he is in fact directing operations from behind the scenes. He always crops up whenever atrocities occur. The question of how far Wiranto is behind all of this has not really been fully explored. I think the reason it has not been fully explored is that sufficient pressure has not yet been put on Wiranto. I have noted that—

CHAIR—Sufficient pressure by whom?

Mr Fisher—By Australia, for the international community as a whole.

CHAIR—How is that pressure applied and by whom?

Mr Fisher—The means of applying international pressure are many and varied. I am sure you have heard these things referred to in the last couple of days: threats to withdraw military aid, threats to withdraw IMF and World Bank funding, threats to other aid, threats to Indonesian banking internationally, and various other possibilities—pressure that could be applied by international organisations and by national governments.

I do not think sufficient pressure has been applied yet to find out which side of the fence Wiranto will fall. Like most people in power in Indonesia, he obviously wants to maximise his own power in the situation. I think if enough pressure were applied it would become clear which side Wiranto is on, and this would immediately determine whether the Indonesian military in East Timor is isolated or absolutely integrated with the Indonesian army as a whole. If it is absolutely integrated with the Indonesian army as a whole, this becomes a far greater problem, of course, for the international organisations.

I have drawn attention to various recent events. The curfew was announced by General Wiranto just a couple of days ago and, at the time, he made a point of announcing that anyone violating the curfew would be shot on sight. But he made no reference whatsoever to what times the curfew covered, so it seems to me this is providing a recipe for arbitrary summary execution. In fact, the entire martial law which has been announced is a very retrograde step. I think Minister Downer has pointed out that this is really giving more licence to the people who are actually causing the problem. The Indonesian military, in massive numbers, have not been able to keep the peace in East Timor. This is just introducing further power to these people who are not keeping the peace.

I have noted that next week there is a joint military exercise called Crocodile 99 which will involve Australian and US personnel in large numbers. I have made the point in my submission that if an international force is not sent into East Timor before then, there will not be much left to save, there will just be a bloody mess to clear up. At this stage, it is still possible for East Timor substantially to be saved if an international force is sent in immediately. If it is not, I would characterise Crocodile 99 as perhaps one of the most disgraceful and shameful joint military exercises in history—certainly in Australia's history.

CHAIR—Do you understand the logistical purposes of Crocodile 99.

Mr Fisher—I have not really looked into the details, no.

CHAIR—I am just wondering because your statement is a very strong statement.

Mr Fisher—Yes.

CHAIR—But it may well be that the exercises that are being undertaken in Crocodile 99 are completely inappropriate for Indonesia and for East Timor. You cannot just go on the fact that there are a few warships and a few troops there. They may be completely inappropriate forces.

Mr Fisher—I am not suggesting that those forces coming here for Crocodile 99 should be sent to East Timor.

CHAIR—Right.

Mr Fisher—All I am saying is that this bears directly on the nature of the relationship between Australia and the US—the military relationship—and if there is no international force as a result of the US refusing to contribute, this is certainly a cause for some shame on the part of the US and perhaps Australia should, for the first time ever, seriously look at what value the US alliance is to us. This is, as far as I can see—and I think a lot of people would agree—Australia's greatest foreign policy crisis certainly since the Vietnam War, possibly since World War II when we were in danger of being invaded, and America is basically just sitting on its hands when Australia is pleading for something to happen.

CHAIR—I just wanted that clarified about Crocodile 99. Through my involvement in the estimates process I know, as would other senators here, that these exercises are put down 12 months or two years in advance. Just the sheer nature of the exercise might not in any way reflect the capacity of that exercise. You just could not lift it up and transfer it—

Mr Fisher—No. I am not suggesting that the exercise should be lifted to East Timor at all.

CHAIR—No, that is why I just wanted that clarified.

Mr Fisher—I am just talking about what it is symbolic of, which is the military relationship between Australia and the US. My final paragraph is fairly self-explanatory, I think. Very serious violations have occurred. Bishop Belo's house and the Red Cross centre were destroyed, the bishop has been forced into exile, a US policeman has been seriously wounded, churches have been violated and become slaughter houses, and so on. I am not sure about the fate of Isa Bradridge. This is something that was raised before the committee yesterday and I have not heard any further news about that at this stage. That is my supplementary submission.

I have had the advantage, in speaking last, of being able to listen to a lot of the proceedings before the committee, so I am able to comment on a lot of things that have come up, which is an advantage I appreciate very much indeed. I heard this morning that Father Hilario had been killed in Suai. I met Father Hilario last year. He was a very charming man, a very fluent speaker of English.

CHAIR—How long have you been visiting East Timor?

Mr Fisher—I have been there twice. I went there in 1998 and 1999. Obviously, the story that Father Hilario has been killed has not been confirmed, so it is premature to say that this is something to be very upset about, but if he has been killed, I am upset about this.

I note the statement by the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Denis Burke, this morning that the Australian government should immediately act to sustain the UNAMET compound in Dili. I believe this is a very good move which could be made by the Australian government. If the UN pulls out of East Timor altogether, it would be very problematic for the international community, in any shape or form, to return to East Timor. Quite apart from that, the 1,500 refugees in the compound would probably be in danger of immediate death.

Senator BROWNHILL—If you put Australian troops in there, how would you be able to do that without going in under the United Nations auspices and a Blue Beret? Doesn't this really come back to the United States actually backing the Security Council?

Mr Fisher—Yes.

Senator BROWNHILL—Even China said yesterday that they are a bit ambivalent about it, so there is the power of veto on the Security Council.

Mr Fisher—It is a problem, yes.

Senator BROWNHILL—I do not disagree with what you are saying; I disagree with the actual implications of it. I do not disagree with your last comment, 'It's time to stop this bloodbath now.' I do not disagree with that at all, but to do something like that without declaring war on a country that has 200 million people to our immediate north-west is too simplistic.

Mr Fisher—This comes back to my previous point about trying to find out which side of the fence Wiranto is on. I think the Australian government should be pursuing a policy of deliberately trying to drive a wedge between those sections of Indonesia that are prepared to abide by law and order in East Timor and those sections of Indonesia that are deliberately flouting the law and deliberately creating a situation of ethnic cleansing in East Timor.

Senator BROWNHILL—This is basically the nub of my questions, so I would like to get them out of the way now.

CHAIR—Go right ahead.

Senator BROWNHILL—A lot of this is to do with bad timing, I guess—

Mr Fisher—Yes.

Senator BROWNHILL—or with what happened in the elections in Indonesia. A power struggle is now going on in Indonesia itself, obviously, at the highest level, between the

generals and Habibie and, I guess, Megawati is in that somewhere. So it is a conundrum, but I do not think we can blame any particular person or any particular government. It is no good going back and blaming Paul Keating for something he might have agreed to 10 years ago. It is no good doing that. We have got to look at the situation at the moment, and I think that solutions are not easy to come by.

Mr Fisher—No. Solutions are not easy to come by, but I think the Australian government should bear two things in mind. One is that I think the very future of the United Nations is at stake here, if they withdraw from East Timor now and there is no attempt made to go back in to restore the situation.

Senator BROWNHILL—I should not agree from this side, I guess, but I think that if the United Nations withdraw, you have got the problem then of re-establishing. If you look at clauses 6 and 7 of the agreement of the Secretary-General and the two ministers for foreign affairs of Portugal and Indonesia, something should be done now by the United Nations. Then that comes back to the United States of America. I suggest the pressure should be put on the United States of America.

Mr Fisher—I agree.

Senator BROWNHILL—They should look at their international obligations.

Mr Fisher—I agree, yes. I would think that the opportunity of Crocodile 99 would be a very good opportunity to put pressure on the United States.

Senator BROWNHILL—Notwithstanding what the chairman said, they cannot be part of a deployment of troops with any United Nations security force.

Mr Fisher—I am not suggesting that an exercise should be turned into an actual expeditionary force. That is not appropriate. The other thing which I think the Australian government should bear in mind is that Australia's own reputation is also at stake here in a very big way. If Australia were to stand idly by and allow East Timorese to be slaughtered after having massively voted for independence, after having been promised that they could have this democratic process and for the first time in their lives having voted, and massively voted, for independence, this would be a very serious blot on Australia's escutcheon.

Senator BROWNHILL—Where is the blot on Australia? If Australia is doing everything in its power at the moment to get the United Nations to keep to its obligation in the Secretary-General's statement, what else can Australia do? Do you want to declare war?

Mr Fisher—No, I am not suggesting that. I am wondering about the value not only of the US alliance but also of the Indonesian alliance, which is a military alliance. How can Australia have a military alliance with a military which is apparently out of control in East Timor, when our defence minister, Mr Moore, has been trying for days to contact their defence minister, General Wiranto, who is also the head of the army, and he just refuses to come to the phone? This is a situation which is just unacceptable.

There are several other factors which are totally unacceptable in the situation from Australia's point of view. One is that the Australian Ambassador to Jakarta has been shot at. Another is that the Australian consulate, just opened in Dili, has had to close for very serious security reasons. This is just unacceptable. Why is Australia not applying far more pressure on the Indonesian government, and on the Indonesian military with which we have an alliance?

Senator BROWNHILL—I think you will find they have been applying as much pressure as they can. It is all very well for us to sit on the sidelines. It is like watching a good game of Aussie rules or rugby league and saying we would do a bit better if we were on the field.

Mr Fisher—I will put it to you that if sufficient pressure had been applied, we would know by now what the position of General Wiranto would be in all this. Is he sincerely backing everything that is happening in East Timor now, which is ethnic cleansing, or is he distancing himself from it? This is what I want to know, and no Australians do know this.

CHAIR—It has been put to us that games are being played within Indonesian politics. I think you have sat through the inquiry. That has been put to us at this inquiry. Short of actually putting yourself over there, I do not know how one manipulates the games that may well be in operation for internal political reasons within Indonesia. I understand the frustration that you are expressing to us, but what I am trying to convey to you is that the frustration that you express to us is, in most ways, felt by us as well.

Mr Fisher—Yes.

CHAIR—Whether it be influencing government, whether it be influencing the opposition, or whether the minor parties in some way have been able to influence the outcome of events, I think that the one thing that we can say is that there is a sincere fervour to stop the carnage that is taking place. It is mindless, it is senseless, it serves no purpose. If it were physically somehow within our power to switch that off at this very minute, then I think we all would. But that is the frustration.

Mr Fisher—I will put another point to you. Basically, what this committee is concerned with is long-term—

CHAIR—We are concerned about three things. We are concerned about the past, because you cannot ignore it but you cannot change it. We are concerned about the present, but given that the present is dynamic and we are not the executive government, we cannot make day-by-day changes. But we do have a very firm commitment to find out what our role should be in the future because, whilst it is our sincerest hope that the carnage, the trouble, the dislocation will be set straight and peace will return and that over a period of time there will be reconciliation, there will be a healing process, we are also very much interested in the future. How can we assist the East Timorese, not in a paternalistic style, but how can we interact to the best advantage of those people who are undoubtedly going to be in great need of assistance? Hence, our first witness this morning put forward a series of propositions which have not been put before this committee before, which we valued.

Mr Fisher—The point I was going to make to you was that one senator said yesterday that the mind set of those in charge now in East Timor—in other words, the military and militia—is not understood. I find this pretty concerning because we have a military alliance. Australia has a military alliance with Indonesia. How can we not know what the mind set of those in military command in East Timor—

CHAIR—I think that was a statement which would have emanated from me. I am saying that the mind set is not understood in the broader sense. I think our military assessors have got a fairly good understanding of the mind set.

Mr Fisher—Would you say the military alliance with Indonesia has broken down?

CHAIR—I cannot say that. That is not for me to say.

Mr Fisher—It is a matter of serious concern, I think, considering—

CHAIR—You can raise that as a matter of serious concern that this committee should take into consideration.

Mr Fisher—I do.

CHAIR—That is fair enough and we listen to those sorts of submissions.

Mr Fisher—I remind you of another thing that was said yesterday. It was said that nowhere in the 5 May agreement was it said that the next steps after the result of the vote was announced need to be the ratification by the MPR, the Indonesian assembly; that other steps can be taken by the international community towards East Timorese independence, although, in the light of the ethnic cleansing going on, they would seem to be futile steps, perhaps. John Dowd, the Australian head of the International Commission of Jurists, has asked that Australia set up a special court to prosecute war crimes in East Timor. I want to support that call. I think that would be very positive.

CHAIR—Australia or the UN?

Mr Fisher—Australia. One of the messages that is coming from the US is that this is Australia's regional concern. I think this is one of the steps that Australia could take as the strongest regional power to do something positive about East Timor at the moment, so I want to put that as a proposition.

Charles Scheiner stated this morning that Indonesia has declared war on the international community. I would also support that statement. I believe that its actions have gone to that extent. Where this leads, I do not know, because obviously it is not easy to go into East Timor with 20,000 troops on the ground. Again, I come back to my main point: I think we need to drive a wedge between those who want chaos in East Timor and those who are willing to abide by international law and Indonesian law. I think Australia should be deliberately adopting that as a policy—to try to drive that wedge.

I want to ask the senators how they would feel if, having just voted for the first time in their lives for independence, having had the opportunity to vote democratically for the first time in their lives, they were then confronted by thugs and forced at gunpoint to sign a paper saying that that is not what they wanted to do at all.

Senator BROWNHILL—Can I give a reply on my behalf on that: I would feel very disturbed about it, but there is nothing I can do about that either. That is one of the points. I feel disturbed about that. Anyone who sits in parliament would feel very disturbed about it.

CHAIR—I realise the time constraint we have got. Senator Bourne, do you have any questions?

Senator BOURNE—Just a couple of little ones, but are you finished, Mr Fisher?

Mr Fisher—No, I will just make one final point so you can ask your questions. I wanted to actually raise a point from my first submission on the final page so you can clarify it for me. The statement in my second paragraph on the final page states, ‘Foreign policy documents for the period 1974-76 will be released’—this is according to information I got—‘but intelligence reports from that period will not be released.’ Is that in fact the case? Are you considering these past policies in the light of not having access to these intelligence reports?

Senator BOURNE—I think we are considering all of the past policies as part of the terms of reference, and we have asked for whatever information we can get. I cannot tell you what we have had yet—in fact, I think they are still considering what we will be allowed to see—but we can let you know that a bit later if you like.

Mr Fisher—So there is no actual detail on you getting access to these intelligence reports?

Senator BOURNE—I do not know about that, and I do not know what we have actually already been given or promised. I do not think it has even been finalised. Mr Chairman, do you know whether what we are actually getting has been finalised?

CHAIR—No.

Mr Fisher—I would like to draw the committee’s attention to that as a very important question. I think this is a very important issue. In fact, the final speaker will raise something similar with you. Anyway, I have finished all my statements if you want to ask any questions.

Senator BOURNE—You said 20,000 troops, which we thought yesterday, and I heard this morning the Australian defence minister saying that the latest intelligence said 25,000. It seems to be going up a bit daily, which is another concern. Do you have a recommendation that we could possibly do immediately? Goodness knows, we have been trying to think of something and have not come up with an awful lot. If there is anything you can think of that would be useful, that would be good.

Mr Fisher—Constantly over the years, as an Australian citizen I have been told that Australia has a unique relationship with Indonesia and the Australian military has a unique relationship with the Indonesian military, and I think any unique relationship should be put to the test and should be used in any way possible to achieve peace in East Timor.

Senator BOURNE—Yes, exactly.

Mr Fisher—It is a vague general statement, I know.

Senator BOURNE—But very sensible. Thank you.

CHAIR—I have asked the questions I needed to ask during the process—or not necessarily needed to ask but which came to mind. My colleagues do not have any further questions. We might proceed to the last witness, but you are quite welcome to stay at the table.

[11.51 a.m.]

COFFEY, Mr Matthew Martin Joseph (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but should you at any stage wish to give any part of your evidence in private you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I now invite you to make a brief statement to the committee.

Mr Coffey—I would like to thank honourable senators, secretary and staff for allowing me to do this at such a late time. What I would like to point to in my submission is my family's involvement in the situation that is East Timor. I would like to go back to the start of the conflict. A lot of people have been talking about current situations, which I am sure is very relevant, but there is always the question: how do things start and how do they get into this state?

My father, Lawrence Henry Coffey, was a sergeant in the Australian army in the Engineers Corps. He retired and then worked in the marine industry here on the coast of the Northern Territory. From 1945, when he was released from the Defence Force, right up until his passing away two years ago, he had extensive knowledge of and travel in the whole Asian area. One of his voyages—I have his passport here—was on a vessel he built in Ballina in New South Wales, a landing barge called the MV *Glenda Lee*. On 10 October 1975 it arrived in Kupang. That vessel was loaded here in Darwin, with 30,000 rounds of Australian ammunition by Australian ASIS officers. I would like to put that forward.

Another vessel trip, this time into Dili itself in East Timor, on the 11th of the 11th of 1978, was organised, I believe in some way also by these forces. I am more than willing to give you a copy of this passport for you to go through, but what I am trying to put forward today is that in America we have D notices of 25 years. In Australia we have a D notice of 30 years.

Two nights ago, working with some researchers of Noam Chomsky in Vancouver and Boston, Massachusetts, we started to obtain the early 1974 operations of the CIA office in Jakarta, which alludes to the team of ASIS operators, led by a Robyn Smith, who were working out of Darwin and Jakarta to create a counterinsurgency in Timor for purposes unknown. From now on there is a large bunch of Noam Chomsky's people. We have a list about two years long that we are waiting on, so there is no problem. I am not sure whether you are aware of America's constitution—denial of paperwork is a very rare thing in America. Excuses not to release an extended, what we call a D notice, are very, very difficult to make in the American constitutional climate of law.

Here in Australia we will wear the embarrassment of that five-year period. We will know about the operations Australia has had. I place before you the second Tom Sherman report—a mindless, worthless waste of money to take the time and accurate information from these people and compile it into this pile of rubbish. It comes from citizenship to customership here. We have gone from an intelligence organisation worldwide under the yakuza agreement to put forward the protection of civil lives and an ideology under the democratic ideals of gross populism, probably.

We now have a combined Defence Force infrastructure. The Northern Territory is the largest facilitator of defence in Australia—that is, Shoal Bay DSD Base and Kowandi South GCHQ office, and Pine Gap. We are now using these facilities for economic gain over the ideological game of a safe and civil social society. We now look, in the rest of the world's eyes, like a bunch of moral lepers. Can we continue this East Timor situation? It will come out. The dirt and the blood have been on our hands since 1974.

I call on the Senate to make a recommendation to look into releasing at least the documents pertaining to the East Timor fiasco—the staff that were on the vessel with my father—these people that I saw myself, as a 12-year-old boy. I saw them. I then went on this vessel. For the next nine years of my life I was travelling with people. I have heard of special runs out of Changi Airport to Surabaya by oil rig boats owned by Zedco. This was in 1975 and 1976. They had a very good covert delivery system by civilian mariners, by merchant mariners. That is how they were operating.

I would like to see you guys actually do something. It is our morality, it is our credibility, that is on the line here. We created East Timor. It is time for the Tom Shermans of the world to realise that a little bit of bullshit only goes a very little way. The truth goes a very long way. I met the group of the yakuza agreement—shock, horror!—last night in Auckland, New Zealand. All of a sudden Jenny Shipley's statement of 'UNAMET is out' is 'UNAMET is in'. Everything is turned on its head and America does not want to negotiate any more. If Australia continues to pull its forelock to America every time it snaps its fingers and creates a complete Hitlerisation of the situation in and amongst our neighbours, we will go down in history as the Judas of this region. Suharto is gaining more credibility than Australia here, Senator Hogg.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Coffey, for your submission. We will take that into consideration when we are deliberating on the matters before this inquiry.

Senator BOURNE—If you do happen to get those documents from the US intelligence office, we would be very interested in seeing them.

Committee adjourned at 11.58 a.m.