



Submission No 112

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association

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SUBMISSION FROM
Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association (WILTA)
For Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into
Australia's relations with Indonesia

As the representative association in Western Australia for the teachers of Indonesian across all sectors of education, the members of the Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association (WILTA) present the following to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee's inquiry into Australia's relations with Indonesia...

A large percentage of WILTA's 160 members have spent the best part of the last decade working tirelessly in Western Australian schools at a grass roots level to promote the teaching of Indonesian language and to develop and enrich intercultural understandings in the context of our nearest neighbour, Indonesia. WILTA, like other state associations throughout Australia, is a voluntary organisation, run by teachers in their own time.

Our members, working in their individual schools, and also collectively under the banner of WILTA, through projects with Indonesian teachers and schools, and the Indonesian community in Australia, are continuing to do their best to promote positive relations with Indonesia. Despite little funding and the obvious hardships the instability of our world and region is bringing to the situation we continue to do our bit to contribute to the development of a positive Australian Indonesian relationship.

We believe the NALSAS initiative during 1995 – 2003 enabled Australia to move **some way** towards achieving success through *enhancing and expanding Asian languages and Asian studies through all school systems in order to improve Australia's capacity and preparedness to interact internationally, in particular, with key Asian countries.*

This initiative has indeed enhanced and expanded the teaching of Indonesian language in Australian schools but this success will be short lived if the job is left unfinished – **which it is at the moment.** Should we stop too early, the hard work and money already invested will be wasted. We must persevere with this injection of funds for longer so that a whole generation of school students will have, for the duration of their schooling, been provided with ample opportunities to develop a greater understanding of the need to be culturally literate and have opportunities to learn an Asian language of great importance to Australia.

This opportunity must be sustained through high quality education programs based on learning the language of a key Asian country, particularly Indonesian. Schools have only been given a relatively short time to transform a generation of Australian students into Asia-literate adults.

WILTA is acutely aware of the need to continue Commonwealth funding to support teachers in developing quality Indonesian language programs in our schools. Funding is required to continue and expand much needed projects as:

- providing in-country experiences for teachers of Indonesian language (where the government does not allow in-country visits due to the political situation, as is the case at the moment, alternative means of this type of professional learning need to be provided to teachers of Indonesian)
- providing in-country experiences for students of Indonesian language

- providing increased professional development and support for teachers in both language and methodology.

Our Association is run by teachers who volunteer their time to organise professional development for their colleagues. We have very few avenues for obtaining reasonable amounts of funding.

Some important WILTA projects which may not continue due to inability to access sufficient funding are:

- Reciprocal Teacher Visit (a program which sees a short term teacher exchange between the Indonesia Australia Language Foundation in Indonesia and WILTA in Western Australia)
- ongoing teacher workshops which will allow us to bring experts in Indonesian language and teaching from both interstate and from Indonesia.
- Development of an official 'sister school' program between schools in Bali and WILTA member schools

Cessation of NALSAS funding will have a direct impact on our Association's ability to provide these quality professional development projects for teachers of Indonesian and also any state wide activities and programs for students of Indonesian language. As the major provider of professional development for teachers of Indonesian in Western Australia, WILTA has already begun to feel the impact of the cessation of NALSAS funding in particular.

Other priority languages have opportunities to access funding from other institutions and organisations, eg.

- Goethe Institute for the teachers of German
- Alliances Francaise and French Embassy and consulates for the teachers of French
- Italo-Australian Welfare and Cultural Centre for the teachers of Italian
- ATSIC for teachers of Aboriginal languages
- Hyogo Cultural Centre, Japan Foundation and Japanese Embassy for teachers of Japanese

Teachers of Indonesian language do not have these opportunities to source funding from the Indonesian government. It is extremely important that associations such as WILTA have direct access to portions of funding to allow us to continue to support the professional development of our teachers of Indonesian.

If the NALSAS strategy is not replaced with a strategy which supports language teaching, the existing meagre funds budgeted for languages in Australia will be even further stretched as the money that has previously been spread across European and Aboriginal languages needs to be stretched to include Asian languages as well.

Given the current situation in our world and particularly in our region it is sound political strategy that the Commonwealth of Australia continues funding the teaching of Indonesian in Australian schools. We as teachers of Indonesian language need support to consolidate the progress made thus far. The Commonwealth needs to show perseverance in this area and give it continued time and money.

The trend in our universities and schools in downgrading studies of our region and of the Indonesian language will cost us dearly in the long term. We need to balance the drastic effect that events like the continuing religious and political troubles in Indonesia and the terrorist bombings across the world are having on language learning programs at all levels of education in Australia. Continued funding will allow schools and their teachers to attempt to balance this situation.

WILTA is constantly reminded of our State's relative isolation from the rest of Australia as our teachers in WA often miss out on many of the Indonesian language and cultural experiences which our Eastern States colleagues and their students enjoy as an ongoing dimension of their teaching and learning programs. We require financial support to develop and implement programs which will:

- provide an Indonesian language advisory teacher in WA
- provide background speaker teacher assistants in classrooms
- allow associations such as WILTA to sponsor visiting artists and performers from Indonesia and bring Indonesian films and other cultural forms from Indonesia to our communities in WA
- encourage and support high school graduates to become teachers of Indonesian through such ways as providing peer support programs between universities and school
- provide additional pathways for students of Indonesian through VET programs.

We reiterate that it is most important to Indonesia-Australia relations that Indonesian becomes more deeply embedded in the curriculum of Australian education institutions. Steps must be taken immediately to restore significant funding to give the Australian community, including Western Australia, equal opportunities to:

- undertake reciprocal visits by key educators from teachers through to school principals
- participate in more local level cultural exchanges to foster genuine understandings and break down stereotypes
- Increase opportunities for teachers of Indonesian to participate in in-country language courses to upgrade their proficiency and understanding of contemporary issues in Indonesia
- promote and expand the study of Indonesian at all stages of education from primary through to tertiary including support high school graduates to become teachers of Indonesian
- participate in bi-lateral exchange programs for teachers and students
- develop high quality digital resources across all phases of learning which are based on contemporary Indonesian contexts

All the money invested in Science and Technology, to build the best weapons and develop the best security, will not help this region live in peace and harmony. What will help is to give young Australians the ability to understand and relate with the Indonesian people and culture, and them with ours, and for this knowledge and understanding to be shared with families and friends. This can only be done through planned, continuous and cumulative education programs. Only then will we have a chance to be at one with our world neighbours.

Submitted by the President Karen Bailey on behalf of members of the Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association (WILTA) Inc.