



## **Submission No 44**

### **Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia**

**Organisation:** Australian Volunteers International

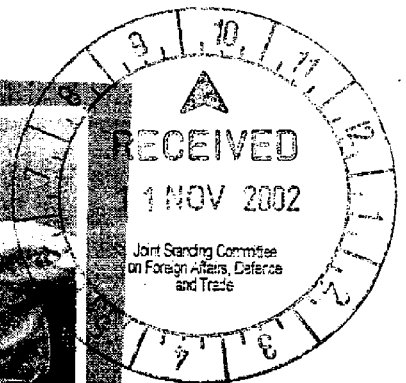
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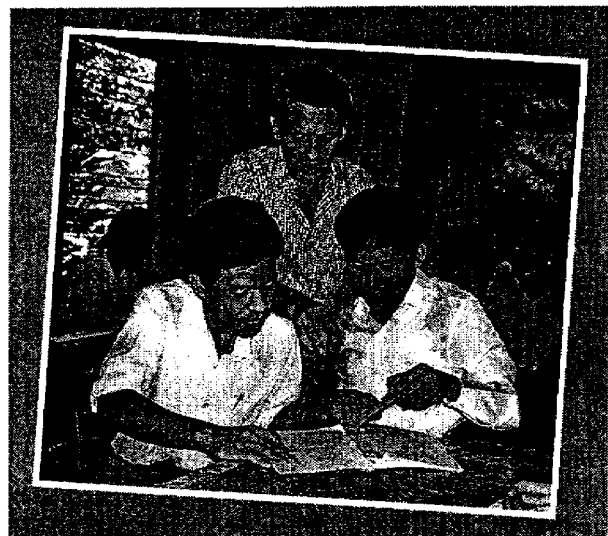


 **australianvolunteers**  
international

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade



**Inquiry into Review  
of Australia's  
Relations with  
Indonesia**



**October 2002**

## **1. Australian Volunteers International**

Australian Volunteers International is Australia's largest and most experienced international volunteer sending agency. It grew out of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme to Indonesia, was named the Overseas Service Bureau in the 1960s and re-named Australian Volunteers International in 1999. Since 1951, more than 6000 assignments have been completed by Australian volunteers; these have been in a broad range of countries, but the majority have been in the Asia-Pacific region. Australian Volunteers International has enjoyed bipartisan support and has received financial support from the Australian Government since the 1960s.

Most volunteer assignments are for 2 years and fill a variety of positions across a wide range of occupational sectors, including education and training, health, agriculture, social work, information technology, documentation and management. They work for central governments, local governments and in civil society. All volunteers are placed in response to specific requests from host employers who, in various ways, take responsibility for the volunteers and manage their presence and contribution. In this way, there are safeguards that volunteers are only placed where they will be welcomed and their skills utilised as planned. Volunteers include people who are in mid-career and retirees as well as those who are relatively recently qualified.

The two key components of the Australian Volunteers International purpose are to:

- provide long-term, culturally sensitive and effective technical assistance which builds lasting relationships with developing countries and knowledge about Australia
- facilitate the integration into Australian culture and life of the cross-cultural experience and understanding gained by its 6000 program participants.

## **2. Australian Volunteers International in Indonesia**

For more than 50 years, Australian Volunteers International has maintained a unique and visible Australian presence in Indonesia. The program has always been based on responding to Indonesian requests for cooperation. It continues to play an important role in strengthening people to people relationships while producing significant outcomes in human resource development and capacity building in both government and non-government settings at all levels of Indonesian society.

*Let me take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude and sincere honour to Australian Volunteers International for its dedication and commitment in providing the qualified staff we currently need.*

*Professor Dr Azyumardi Azra (Rector, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University)*

The program enjoys significant support from the Government of Indonesia, with each volunteer and every placement being endorsed at the highest level.

Approximately 360 Australians have lived and worked in a wide variety of sectors in many provinces throughout the country. Australian Volunteers International's program has played a significant role in facilitating the development of people to people relationships, leading to ongoing links being established in educational, cultural and commercial fields.

*'There's a tradition of regarding volunteers as somehow part of our aid program. My experience of over 30 years tells me that they're very much more than that. Certainly we do hope that Australians who come to Indonesia or anywhere else as volunteers, are able to help, to leave something behind, to show that they've made a difference. But more than that, there's no question that the volunteers take away at least as much as they leave, and that Australia is a very significant beneficiary of that....That's the sort of linkage, the linkages between people beyond just the government, that not only make a difference and always have, but increasingly will in the future as our two societies progressively democratise.'*

*Australian Ambassador to Indonesia Mr Richard Smith, Jakarta, November 2001*

### **3. International volunteering began in Indonesia**

In 1950, at an international student conference (World University Service Assembly) held in Bombay, India, the Australian delegation was challenged by the Indonesian delegation to take on board an interesting idea. With the departure of the Dutch, and as a consequence of colonial educational policy, independent Indonesia had a shortage of skilled people and graduates in many fields. Indonesia would welcome an initiative whereby Australian university graduates came to Indonesia making their expertise available. It was clear they wanted to avoid a repeat of the colonial experience whereby whites would take on authority and prestige. The idea instead was for Australians to live alongside and work alongside Indonesian colleagues, deliberately eschewing the barriers of expatriate life in favour of solidarity and thus allow genuine understanding and relationships to flourish.

The idea inspired a group of people at the University of Melbourne who developed the idea that they would share their skills on the same rates of pay as their Indonesian colleagues, whilst learning more intimately about the people and their lives. The late Prof. Herbert Feith was a member of the committee to develop this idea and then became the first Australian volunteer in 1951 when he sailed to Jakarta to take up a position as a translator with Indonesia's Ministry of Information. His assignment marked the beginnings of Australia's international volunteer program now known as Australian Volunteers International. This was long before Western countries established their official and unofficial volunteer programs. Indonesia was thus the birthplace of international volunteering.

#### 4. Significance of the program

The Indonesia program has remained a cornerstone of Australian Volunteers International. The experiences of the first Australian volunteers in Indonesia have done much to shape the organization's philosophy and style of operating in other areas as well. Indeed, their experience is reflected in the organization's Purpose:

*Australian Volunteers International is committed to work towards a peaceful and just world. It achieves this by providing opportunities for Australians to volunteer to live, work and learn in partnership with people of other cultures. Volunteers contribute to developing communities and bring a reciprocal benefit to Australia.*

Furthermore, the volunteer program in Indonesia has added significance precisely because of the nature of the Indonesia-Australia relationship. In large part, because it is a relationship between neighbours, the relationship is subject to a great deal of scrutiny. Over the last 50 years there have been periods where the official relationship between the two countries has been tense and problematic. Some of these have been shortlived, others have been more long lasting such as the 1963-65 period of Confrontation and in 1999-2000 over East Timor. Despite these difficulties there is a vibrant people to people relationship which has continued and the program of Australian Volunteers International has been instrumental in this. Many former volunteers, starting with Herb Feith, went onto positions of significance in academia, government service, the corporate sector, judiciary and the community sector where they have committed themselves to the relationship and become significant interpreters of Indonesian developments to the Australian community.

"Many of the Australians who know Indonesia best are people who have gained their experience of Indonesia through the AVI program", commented Australian Ambassador, Mr Richard Smith when launching the AVI Indonesia photo exhibition in Jakarta, November 2001. They have helped create a significant constituency in Australia which is well informed about Indonesia and well disposed to the people of Indonesia. Similarly Indonesians who have worked alongside Australian volunteers have learnt that they do not fit the stereotypes as projected by media and politically motivated opinion leaders.

Another reason for the significance of the Indonesia program for Australian Volunteers International is that the relationships it has engendered have stood the test of time. In November 2001, a photo exhibition was held in Jakarta, which portrayed aspects of the first 50 year period of Australian volunteers in Indonesia. The exhibition was opened by the Australian Ambassador and was attended by Australian corporate representatives in Jakarta in addition to Indonesian NGO leaders, politicians and significant numbers of senior civil servants all of whom had first hand knowledge of the program.

It was remarkable how many Indonesians whose experience of the program was decades old made the effort to attend the celebration.

The impact of the program in Indonesia, however, extends beyond the individuals involved and is mediated through Indonesian communities and institutions. The launch of the exhibition was a further demonstration of the program's esteem both in government institutions and civil society. The exhibition was also shown in Melbourne where it was opened by the Indonesian Charge d'Affaires in Australia, Mr Imron Cotan. In attendance were volunteers from each of the last five decades all of whom have maintained professional as well as personal ties to Indonesia.

Paradoxically, it could be precisely because of the tough times in the relationship that the impact of the volunteer program has been so great. When there is tension, when there is instability or insecurity in Indonesian social life and when a seemingly hostile spotlight is turned on the presence of foreigners - in this case Australians - the fact that they have tended not to take flight and return home, but to take counsel from Indonesian colleagues and neighbours and to be there with them through the tough times, has deepened these relationships quite intensely.

At the time of the Bali bombing, there were 25 volunteers in various parts of Indonesia. Despite frequent and well publicized Travel Advisories issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and despite volunteers knowing they had organisational support if they wanted to return to Australia because of security concerns, they elected to stay in country. Volunteers reported high levels of support being offered by Indonesian colleagues and also documented a widely held sense of dismay and shame amongst Indonesians. As one current volunteer wrote two days after the bombing:

*For Indonesians, this has been devastating. The first message of sympathy and regret I got from an Indonesian colleague here, a pious and caring Muslim, and lecturer in Islamic humanities, read: "I deeply regret this. My country is ruined."*

There was a strongly expressed feeling amongst volunteers of not wanting to abandon Indonesian friends and colleagues at this time.

Australian Volunteers International is currently in discussion with a small Islamic group which advocates for women's rights regarding placing a volunteer with them. On the day after the bombing we received this message from them:

*I and all our staff condole with the Australians who became the victims of terrorist attack in Bali. I hope that the accident will not make our relation become backward in the future. In addition, that it will become the glue between your and our institutions to work toward a peaceful world.*

## **5. Experienced staff**

Australian Volunteers International staff working on the Indonesia program have extensive experience and intimate knowledge of Indonesia, its people, language, culture and development concerns. The team is led by Mr Peter Britton, a fluent Indonesian speaker who first visited Indonesia in 1968. He lived and worked in Indonesia in 1971-72 and as an Australian volunteer in Jakarta in 1983-84. He has designed, managed and directed projects in Southeast Asia, the Pacific and Africa. In Indonesia, he maintains a wide network of contacts among senior Government officials, NGO leaders, academics and intellectuals.

Mr Leon Jones is responsible for managing, monitoring and developing the program in Indonesia. A former volunteer with long experience in Indonesia, he has advanced knowledge of Indonesian/Malay and has worked on development projects in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Palestine.

Australian based staff are supported in Indonesia by Mr Irbel Budaya, Australian Volunteers International's Liaison Officer in Jakarta. He brings a wealth of private, public and community sector experience to the work of liaising with central Government agencies.

## **6. Program responsive to changing requests and opportunities**

Over the last 50 years the Australian Volunteer program in Indonesia has varied in its numbers, geographical distribution within Indonesia and in the configuration of sectors and partnerships. These changes over time have reflected programming opportunities and constraints as they have arisen, reflecting locally identified need and trends. Australian Volunteers, approximately 350 of them, have lived and worked right across the archipelago in most provinces. They have been engaged in education, health, agriculture, community development, environment and other sectors. They have worked in government departments and agencies, universities, schools and other educational institutions as well as national level and local level NGOs.

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the majority of Australian Volunteers in Indonesia were involved in education or training in both formal and non-formal contexts. In the early to mid 1980s, the volunteer program was concentrated in national level NGOs. By the late 1980s, this NGO activity was supplemented with the reemergence of placements as requested in a number of Government Departments.

In the early 1990s, the program was able to expand and in this period there was some emphasis on placements in English language training, particularly in the vocational training sector along with secondary and tertiary institutes. The dominant trend, however, was an accentuation of placements with Indonesian NGOs particularly smaller, local organisations in the Outer Islands.



## **7. New Strategy in the post Suharto era**

The post Suharto era brought a whole new set of circumstances, including an abrupt break in the Australia-Indonesia relationship over East Timor. It became essential for Australian Volunteers International to undertake, in early 2000, a review of its program and to develop a new strategic framework that took into account the changes taking place in Indonesia and the altered circumstances of its relationship with Australia. As a result of this review which involved discussions with many stakeholders in Indonesia and Australia, several broad directions were selected as guides to the future development of the volunteer program.

### **7.1 Decentralisation**

The first of these considerations relates to the laws determining a widescale decentralisation of government functions from central government departments in Jakarta to district level government. There has been enormous public discourse on the costs and benefits of this devolution of power, and understandably large amounts of bureaucratic politicking to preserve and enhance areas of authority. However, it has become clear that district level government will now be the level of government from which services are delivered to the people. As such, it is a particularly useful context in which to imagine Australian volunteers not only sharing their skills, but learning directly about the communities they inhabit and serve. Australians working in the public sector, especially at state and local government level, and in the community sector have skills that are particularly relevant to efforts to make the formulation of policy and delivery of services at district level more effective and accountable. The initial responses to this approach have been very encouraging with several district (kabupaten) governments requesting volunteers to be with them. We expect this to increase.

### **7.2 Indonesian NGOs**

Another consideration related to the changes that had affected Indonesian NGOs. Over recent decades Indonesian NGOs played a crucial role in empowering civil society and promoting a climate for reform. For much of the New Order period the politics of opposition was not possible and activists found in NGOs a useful arena for their work. With the changes to a more open political environment many NGO leaders were able to move into mainstream political life as party members, MPs, lobbyists or even Ministers. Larger national level NGOs experienced in the world of advocacy, now had direct channels for influencing policy and have been able to continue their role as pacesetters for change.

For NGOs involved in actually delivering programs and services, there have been other changes. Vast increases in the amounts of funds available from foreign donors, particularly for democratisation training, saw many established NGOs abandon their traditional activities of community development and social service delivery. There was also a phenomenon of many new NGOs appearing so as to make use of the contracting opportunities that had presented themselves. From AVI's point of view,

this now meant we recognised a need to be even more selective than we had been in the past ensuring that organisations we worked with were actually driven by a values base, committed to wider community development outcomes, rather than simply business opportunities.

### **7.3 Geographic considerations**

Historically, Australian Volunteers International's program in Indonesia has been extremely widespread across the archipelago. As a result of political and social unrest, security considerations have made certain areas unsuitable for volunteer placement including Papua, Aceh, Maluku and parts of Sulawesi. In the course of the review, it was also discovered that as a result of many Australian aid activities being concentrated in the Eastern part of Indonesia, this had fuelled the growth of misperceptions amongst Indonesians expressing doubts about Australia's intentions. There was a mischievous theory being put about by some well placed Indonesians that Australia wanted to see Indonesia break up. To counteract these misperceptions and to demonstrate our bona fide intentions about establishing worthwhile relationships, Australian Volunteers International has purposely sought opportunities for cooperation in Western Indonesia, especially Sumatra and Java.

### **7.4 Indonesian Islam**

The allegations in Indonesia that Australians would support separatism were closely linked to assertions that Australians were anti-Islamic and more comfortable working in the East of the country because that enabled work with predominantly Christian communities. It was easy to see how this particular notion could have gained currency particularly with the heightened sense of fear and mistrust in the current world situation. In both Australia and Indonesia, particularly in the media, there is more currency in simplistic stereotypes borne of ignorance than in genuine knowledge, sympathy or empathy. In an otherwise deep and multidimensional people-to-people relationship there remains a profound lack of information and understanding amongst Australians about Islam, in general, and Islam in Indonesia.

This presented an opportunity where Australian volunteers working with Indonesian Muslims can demonstrate that not all Australians share what is understandably seen as the Western phobia of Islam and are genuinely interested in the values, philosophy and ways of life of their neighbours. Just as importantly, the knowledge and understanding these Australians develop is crucially important as a way of informing their own community and helping to combat the xenophobic attitudes that can thrive here as easily as anywhere. Fortunately, Australian Volunteers International staff had long known and been known to Islamic organisations and leaders who were prepared to introduce the program to organisations and institutions they thought would welcome Australian participation. We have every expectation that this will be a growing component of our program of cooperation and an important means by which we can add value to the Indonesia-Australia relationship.

## 7.5 Program benefits

With the articulation of these strategies, there has been an enthusiastic response from Indonesians. There is an instant appreciation of the intrinsic value of exposing Australians to Indonesian issues, outlooks and ways of doing things. While it is individual Australians who initially will have this privilege, the social benefit accrues from the influence those Australians can exercise back home in combating negativity and ignorance. Similarly, there is a ready recognition that to expose Indonesian institutions, individuals and communities to Australian outlooks, values and personalities can also set the scene for powerful learning experiences on the part of the Indonesians concerned. For each 'side', there is the opportunity to make that leap of understanding that enables people to see through others' eyes.

*... the key to effective... development work (is) acquiring a sympathetic understanding of the values and beliefs of their local counterparts. What was important was not dialogue, what was said on both side, but the relationship that developed over time between the individual volunteer and the local populace. In those instances where the volunteer is perceived as empathetic with the local culture and interested in participating in it as fully as possible is the mutually beneficial influence.*

*Dane Smith, Building relationships-Ending conflict through mutual self-understanding  
Worldview Magazine-National Peace Corps Association Vol.15 No.2.*

## 8. Current partnerships

Australian Volunteers International's program has increased in recent years and is still building. In October 2002, there are 25 Australian volunteers currently in placement.

Recent (and planned ) volunteers are deployed as follows:

### Central government:

- Indonesia's Department of Foreign Affairs Training Academy: Teaching English to Indonesian diplomats, Jakarta
- Indonesian Institute of Sciences: Assisting the Population Studies Centre, Jakarta and the Botanical Gardens, Bogor
- Secretariat General, House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia

### Provincial government:

- Provincial Development Planning Bureau of West Nusatenggara: Health Services and Environmental Health, Mataram, Lombok

### Local government:

- District Government of Ende: Education, Ende, Flores

- District Government of Ngada: Education, Bajawa, Flores
- District Government of Sikka: Education, Maumere, Flores
- District Government of Tanah Datar: Education, Batu Sangkar, West Sumatra

**Higher Education:**

- Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta
- Muhammadiyah University, Yogyakarta, Central Java
- Widya Mandala University, Surabaya, East Java
- Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Central Java
- Srwijaya University, Palembang, South Sumatra
- Atma Jaya University, Yogyakarta

**Secondary Education:**

- Dwiwarna Islamic Secondary School, Parung, West Java

**Non-formal Education:**

- Yasa Luhur Foundation, Salatiga, Central Java
- Gloria Educational Foundation, Palembang, South Sumatra
- Trianandra Economics Academy, Jakarta
- 17<sup>th</sup> August Language Academy, Semarang, Central Java
- Gembala Baik Foundation, Pontianak, West Kalimantan

**NGO:**

Gita Pertiwi, Agriculture and Environment, Solo, Central Java

LSPPA( Early Childhood Education), Yogyakarta

INFID (International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development), Jakarta

SMERU Research Institute, Jakarta

Consumers' Association, Jakarta

APIK (Women's Association for Justice), Jakarta

Rahima (Islamic Womens' Rights), Jakarta

## **9. Additional Activities**

In 2001-2002, Australian Volunteers International also managed the Australia-Indonesia Institute's Youth Exchange Program. This is a program with very strong synergy and complementarity with the volunteer program, in that it provides opportunities for accelerated experiential learning for participants in a context of building understanding and relationships.

In May 2002, Australian Volunteers International was invited to provide a delegate to the inaugural Australia-Indonesia Young Leaders Dialogue initiated by the Australia-Indonesia Institute. This proved to be a particularly useful forum for an exchange of views amongst young people engaged in a variety of sectors and is an initiative that could usefully be broadened.

In 2002-2003, Australian Volunteers International is collaborating with the Asia Education Foundation based at the University of Melbourne to implement a pilot program to exchange teachers. This activity is funded by the Department of Education, Science and Technology.

## **10. Future Program**

After the financial crisis and the fall of Suharto, Indonesia has struggled to find a path to economic recovery and domestic security. To a large extent this depends on a reform process targeted at major economic institutions, the judiciary and the bureaucracy and on the resolution of fundamental constitutional issues affecting civil-military relations, separation of powers and even the form of the state. It is not Australian Volunteers International's role to solve any of the many problems that Indonesia currently faces in its attempt to make a transition towards a more transparent, accountable and democratic way of governing. However, there is a meaningful role in identifying Indonesians who envisage a better future for their country and working alongside them.

*Volunteering is the ultimate expression of what the United Nations is all about: service and solidarity and the belief that together we can make our world better.*

*UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan*

The volunteer program can make a meaningful contribution to improved **governance** by responding to selected requests from central government agencies and by seeking out district governments with genuine interest in capacity building through the placement of appropriately qualified volunteers. Australian Volunteers International will also maintain a selective involvement in Indonesian civil society. Governance is also an emphasis of the recent Ministerial Statement *Australian Aid: Investing in Growth, Stability and Prosperity*, tabled in the Federal Parliament in 2002. Australian Volunteers International has a strong commitment to placements that respond to locally identified need and this also reflects the Ministerial Statement's priority of "working increasingly within the development frameworks of partner countries" (p21).

Australian Volunteers International will seek to diversify the sectors in which placements are sought to attempt to accommodate in the program well qualified people coming forward in the Australian community. **Education** will remain as the dominant sector, both because of the strength of demand from Indonesian partners and because, by its nature, education multiplies the impact of relationship building.

Geographically, Australian Volunteers International will maintain a non-exclusive focus on **Western Indonesia**. These are the areas (eg Java and Sumatra) of greatest population and population density, and are predominantly Muslim.

A principal agenda for Australian Volunteers International will be to build cooperative relationships with **Islamic institutions and organisations**. This will encompass state institutions as well as civil society. Through personal connections and networks, there are opportunities to work in a variety of modernist and traditionalist Islamic settings. Aside from the technical developmental inputs by volunteers in their respective sectors, their presence and engagement would model broader world views than currently exist in most of these environments. There are religious leaders of both modernist and traditionalist persuasion who would welcome this involvement. This activities could include further development of civil society, promotion of human rights, education, delivery of social services and community development.

In current global and regional circumstances, there is an important message to be conveyed by Australians working alongside Indonesian Muslims in Islamic settings. This may dilute the understandable impression that Australians, like other Westerners, have an allergy to Islam. Hopefully, through mediating the knowledge and experience of the Australian volunteers more broadly into the Australian community, there will also be some punctures in the bubble of ignorance and fear that Australians have of Indonesian Islam.

## **11. Recommendations**

In order to improve Australia's relations with Indonesia, it is recommended:

1. That the Australian government facilitate, and where appropriate implement, a greater range of activities by which:
  - a) Australians can deepen their understanding of the plurality of Indonesia and the challenges and aspirations of Indonesian people
  - b) the broadest range of organisations within the Australian community can develop agendas of engagement with Indonesian society (that is not only in the educational sector)
  - c) there are increased opportunities for a greater number of institutional linkages between public, community and business sector agencies in Australia and Indonesia, and
  - d) that such activities are characterised by a learning attitude not just to overcome Australian lack of understanding, but to demonstrate a respect for the sophistication and complexity of Indonesia.

2. That the Australian government strengthen its aid and development cooperation program to Indonesia, with
  - a) an increased emphasis in the design and implementation stages, on a whole of government approach, and
  - b) which gives primacy to improving understanding and relationships beyond the level of formal diplomacy.
  
3. That the Australian government adopt a policy approach based on the recognition of two-way benefit, to all linkages and development cooperation activities.
  
4. That the Australian government re-invest in the teaching of Indonesian language and area studies at both secondary and tertiary levels.
  
5. That the Australian government fund research into the history and long term benefits of people to people relationships in contributing to Australia-Indonesian relations and in particular, the role of international volunteering.
  
6. That the Australian government
  - a) review its progress against the recommendations adopted at the UN General Assembly Debate on *Government and United Nations System Support for Volunteering* in New York, 5 December 2001, to which Australia was a signatory, and
  - b) commit to an ongoing program of implementation.

## 12. Attachments

Attached are:

1. Peter Britton, "International Volunteering and Global Survival", article by Australian Volunteer International staff member published in *Islamic Millennium Journal*, Volume 2, Number 2, Jan-March 2002. This journal is published in Indonesia but circulates internationally.
2. Rachael Diprose, "The First Volunteer", article by current Australian Volunteer in *Inside Indonesia*, April-June 2002.
3. Australian Volunteers in Indonesia 1951-2001. List of volunteers and their assignments produced to accompany the Photographic exhibition to showcase 50 years of Australian Volunteers in Indonesia.
4. Australian Volunteers International Annual Report, 2000-1; 2001-2.

