



Submission No 64

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: Open High School

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Committee Secretary, JSCFADT
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Re: Inquiry into Australia's relations with Indonesia
by Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

"Our nearest neighbour is Indonesia, which is entering an especially challenging period in its evolution as a nation ... Our future prosperity and security will depend on our ability to understand these cultures and to build bridges to the citizens of these nationsit is impossible to overstate the case for expanding our collective knowledge of the languages and customs of our neighbours." Chief of the Defence Force Peter Cosgrove, 30/5/02.

The economic, political, and strategic importance of our nearest neighbour was referred to recently by the Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello: "Australians are enmeshed in the rich tapestry of Asia, as Asia is an increasingly important influence on Australia. Moments of crisis highlight our common destiny. In 1997 it was a financial crisis. Today it is a human tragedy. At these points of crisis we must not withdraw. We must heighten our engagement and our cooperation. We must work together. "

The Bali bombing attack has shown the closeness of the 2 countries and the need for Australians proficient in Indonesian language and cultural and political knowledge.

It has also shown the need for Australia to share its military expertise with Indonesia by helping to train various parts of the Indonesian military here in Australia, and therefore imbuing those members with qualities of justice and humanity.

Australia has worked hard these last 25 years to build up closer ties with Indonesia. With the aid of National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) funding, there has been a state-wide effort by schools to turn a generation of Australian students into Asia-literate adults. This was a stated aim of the Commonwealth Minister for Education in 1999 when he re-affirmed commitment to the study of Asian languages and Asian studies in Australian schools, by pledging the continuation of NALSAS funding for 1999 to 2002.

To achieve a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with Indonesia we need these Indonesian-literate adults. So the NALSAS funding is essential to enable proper teaching of Asian languages; without a national policy there will not be a coordinated approach and the teaching of Indonesian would be very piecemeal. The effects of the withdrawal of funding spiral outwards in an ever-damaging circle. Specialist suppliers of Indonesian resources and services to schools will decrease as their

market diminishes. Principals in schools will be reluctant to allow Indonesian programs in schools if they are to be expected to fund the teaching, with its many resource needs, solely from their limited school budgets, with no extra funding for the upgrading of their teachers' skills through workshops, conferences, and in-country training. If the supply of up-to-date resources dries up then students are discouraged from attempting a language with out-dated materials. LOTE cannot be taught without these resources and up-dating and refining of teachers' skills and knowledge.

At the moment the Indonesian Department at the Open High School is hosting two Work Experience young adults from Indonesia; they are part of a group over here with the Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program 2002-2003, funded by TCN The Communications Network and the Australia-Indonesia Institute. It is a very valuable experience for the two girls and for us and our students as we are able to use these girls to enhance our teaching materials and to give both us and our students conversation practice. It is to be regretted that there is not much interchange of this sort in the schools generally, and for teachers in particular.

In light of the above, it is hugely disappointing that the Commonwealth seems to be backing away from its commitment to support the teaching of Indonesian language and culture throughout the school system, from primary to senior secondary classes. Funding needs to be increased from the previous \$30 million per year as this has had to be spread so widely over education departments of Federal, State and Territory governments. There has not been sufficient time since the introduction of the NALSAS strategy in 1994 to educate Australian students about the Indonesian language and culture and the role of Australia in this region. We urge the government to listen to the needs of our future adults, and not to let our relationship with Indonesia, and the study of the Indonesian language, die.

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Similar submissions were made by other teaching staff at the Open High School, Randwick



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