



Submission No 27

## **Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste**

Organisation: University of Melbourne

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
*Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee*



# **Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste**

## **Partnership and Potential: Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e – University of Melbourne**

**Prepared by the Melbourne Engagement & Partnerships Office  
The University of Melbourne**

28 March 2013

## Executive Summary

Universities are diverse institutions with access to a wide range of interdisciplinary expertise. They are national resources that can be drawn upon and supported to strengthen regional and international relationships. The University of Melbourne (UoM) has recently consolidated and formalised its connections with the national university of Timor-Leste, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL), through a five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The projects and programs arising from that MOU provide insight into how higher education institutions can partner together to address major societal, environmental and economic issues.

This submission addresses the term of reference that captures 'cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges', but contains obvious overlaps with and impacts on the other terms as well. Recommendations for future opportunities are highlighted where appropriate.

### Recommendations

- 1) *That the Australian Government supports the development and implementation of museum and archive skills in Timor-Leste and that AusAid considers a stronger emphasis on cultural development as part of its in-country and Australian Leadership Award Fellowships (ALAF) support.*
- 2) *That the Australian Government works with the Government of Timor-Leste and UNTL to support the development and implementation of modern library services and systems.*
- 3) *That the Australian Government offers greater assistance to support the development and implementation of language and literacy programs in Timor-Leste to help the nation achieve its educational aspirations.*
- 4) *That the Australian Government supports greater engagement and collaboration between Australian and East Timorese universities.*

### Introduction

The University of Melbourne is widely regarded as one of the leading higher education providers in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>1</sup>. This privileged position informs a sense of place and purpose; UoM seeks to contribute to the region in meaningful and impactful ways across a breadth of disciplines and fields. Our relationships with neighbouring nations are valued and important. Through its academic researchers and wider networks, UoM possesses a rich history of numerous and varied interactions with the people and institutions of Timor-Leste. We recognise that our partnership with UNTL consolidates these activities and can better connect us to local knowledge and an existing network of robust national and regional relationships.

This paper highlights our relationship with UNTL and provides an update on five specific projects, identified by UNTL as strategic priorities and enacted under the MOU. Those projects are:

- Cultural Materials Conservation

---

<sup>1</sup> Regional rankings: [THE World University Rankings](#) (#2); [QS World University Rankings](#) (#7); [ARWU](#) (#3)

- Library Renewal Program
- Language and Education
- Food Production and Security
- Risk and Hazard Mapping

Although numerous other relationships exist between UoM staff and students and the people and institutions of Timor-Leste<sup>2</sup>, they are not covered in depth here.

## Background

UoM is committed to developing lasting relationships locally, nationally and internationally to enrich scholarship, research, cultural and community life, while stimulating critical enquiry and public debate on issues of global significance. Our relationships and roles within the Asia-Pacific region feature prominently in our strategic plans<sup>3</sup>. Timor-Leste occupies a unique position in the Australian psyche; since its independence in 2002, Australia has been Timor-Leste's 'largest development partner'<sup>4</sup>. UoM has numerous and varied relationships spanning myriad fields and disciplines with individuals and organisations across Timor-Leste.

In the late 2000s, UoM embarked on the development of a whole-of-university strategy to engage staff, students, alumni and wider partners to work together with Timorese partner organisations in support of Timor-Leste's *Strategic Development Plan 2011 – 2030*<sup>5</sup>. UoM conducted a joint scoping exercise with UNTL in 2010. This exercise revealed diverse interactions across multiple faculties between the two institutions. UNTL is an ideal regional partner to engage and interact with Timor-Leste more broadly; as Timor-Leste's national university, UNTL possesses a strong local presence and support, expertise in teaching and research and established governmental, industry, and NGO linkages. The two universities formalised a partnership by executing a five-year MOU in September 2011.

## Partnership Objectives

The UNTL-UoM MOU signals the intention of our organisations to encourage our students, staff and communities to work together in teaching and learning, research, and engagement activities. It also encourages us to continue to identify other opportunities for collaboration in areas of common significance in Timor-Leste including:

- (i) language and education;
- (ii) social justice;

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, three AusAID scholarship recipients from Timor-Leste were enrolled at UoM in 2012; the Director of the Nossal Institute for Global Health recently attended a joint United Nations Conference in Dili examining the post-2015 development agenda; and, UoM works closely with the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development to support the Department's Timor-Leste public official training program, when requested.

<sup>3</sup> See pages 9-11 of '[Growing Esteem](#)' and the Research at Melbourne '[Grand Challenges](#)'.

<sup>4</sup> [AusAID](#), 2013

<sup>5</sup> Accessible online at the Government of Timor-Leste [website](#).

- (iii) natural disaster and resource management;
- (iv) sustainability;
- (v) culture and the arts;
- (vi) student engagement;
- (vii) enhancement of the resourcing of, and access to, modern libraries; and
- (viii) medicine and community health.

UNTL and UoM identified five initial priority projects for inclusion in the MOU. Those projects and current progress are detailed below.

### **Cultural Materials Conservation**

Since 2000 the UoM Centre for Cultural Materials and Conservation (CCMC) has been working with staff in the East Timorese Secretariat of State for Culture to build capacity in the preservation of cultural material. This has involved partnerships with a range of NGOs, donor organisations, private donors and UNESCO Jakarta. It has included both in-country training and seminars at UoM. In 2006 and 2008, AusAid provided funds for staff from the Secretariat of State for Culture to undertake training at the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, at UoM, and with partners including the National Gallery of Victoria, Artlab Australia and the Powerhouse Museum. More recently, UNTL, the Secretariat of State for Culture and the CCMC have been examining how to develop programs in the archive conservation and museum development capacity of Timor-Leste. A course in audio visual preservation, in collaboration with the National Film and Sound Archive, the Secretariat for Culture in Timor-Leste and UNTL is currently in approval stage.

The CCMC is also conducting or facilitating a number of other projects in Timor-Leste. These include the provision of technical advice and support to the Balibo House Trust and the Balibo community for the conservation of the iconic Australian flag painted on the side of Balibo House; advice for the proposed cultural centre in Los Palos; a preservation assessment of written and oral records of tsunamis and earthquakes along the north-east coastline of Timor-Leste; and work with Timor Aid on Timorese tais.

**Recommendation:** *That the Australian Government supports the development and implementation of museum and archive skills in Timor-Leste and that AusAid considers a stronger emphasis on cultural development as part of its in-country and ALAF support.*

### **UNTL Library Renewal Program**

The UoM library has sought ways to assist UNTL to rebuild a library that delivers services to support its teaching and research needs and contributes to its endeavours of producing 'in-country' graduates.

In 2010, the UoM University Librarian visited UNTL to survey the state of library services, collections and staff capacity. Information gathered from the visit was instrumental in forming a collaborative partnership with Victoria University (VU) and Charles Darwin University librarians. The collaboration provided a forum for discussing funding opportunities for the UNTL Library; the development, delivery and funding of a nine-week staff development program for the newly-appointed University

Librarian at UNTL; and the co-sponsorship of the UNTL University Librarian's attendance at an important national library conference in 2012.

In late 2011, the UoM library funded two senior library staff to undertake an environmental scan of UNTL's library service. The librarians gained an insight into the challenges of: developing relevant library collection policies; designing library services that support the diverse languages used in the curricula; and developing staff capacity to provide library services to support UNTL's academic programs.

Throughout 2012, the UoM library worked in conjunction with VU and Charles Darwin University libraries to seek funding from AusAID and a philanthropic division of a large international publishing house. The joint project was conceived to support the implementation of an automated library system that will bring UNTL's geographically dispersed collections together and foster a richer resource environment for the UNTL community. While these submissions were unsuccessful, there was a strong commitment from the participating universities to provide ongoing support to UNTL library.

In August 2012, librarians from UoM led a small team of experts drawn from the fields of library services and systems, as well as a systems vendor, for a five-day visit to UNTL. The team performed an environmental scan for the implementation of an Integrated Library Management System (ILMS), which was the first crucial stage of rebuilding the UNTL library capacity.

The environmental scan took into account current information technology infrastructure and any developments likely to take place over the next one to two years. The visit also provided an opportunity for the team to reconnect with library staff from previous visits and identify training and resource needs required to support the successful implementation of an ILMS. The project team submitted a report on the current infrastructure capabilities of UNTL. It is hoped that the report will inform UNTL Executive's decision to implement an integrated library management system.

This project corresponds in part, and is set against the backdrop of, a larger UNTL initiative aiming to design, build and house the National Library for Timor-Leste.

The UoM library continues to foster an ongoing interest in the development of UNTL Library services and collections. The nature and extent of such support will be determined by the directions set by the UNTL Senior Executive and the roles which it sees the Australian university library partners playing in the future.

**Recommendation:** *That the Australian Government works with the Government of Timor-Leste and UNTL to support the development and implementation of modern library services and systems.*

### **Language and Education**

The Language and Education program is twofold. UoM and UNTL are working together to identify areas where staff and students from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education and UNTL can access opportunities for student placements within Timor-Leste and build capacity in the areas of teaching and learning at both institutions. To date, no student exchanges have occurred, however, a staff education and development program has been trialled. In March 2012, UoM hosted a pilot,

week-long intensive training program for seven UNTL Vice Deans. The course included the opportunity to 'shadow' senior staff from UoM faculties as well as basic tailored training based on UoM's Future Academic Leaders Program.

UoM's language programs have sought to encourage both English language and mother tongue literacy. The Director of the Research Unit for Multilingualism and Cross-Cultural Communication is currently working on the implementation of a project to improve childhood literacy in Timor-Leste. Through collaborative work with local and in-country partners, UoM is supporting the production of early reading materials for Timorese primary school children in an initial range of official and mother tongue languages. The project takes a sustainable, long-term and interdisciplinary approach. There is much potential for UoM, UNTL, the Ministry of Education, and local organisations to improve the literacy outcomes and primary education levels of the citizens of Timor-Leste. Anecdotal evidence revealed that, as a result of insufficient English language proficiency, AusAID was unable to fill its allocated quota of scholarships for tertiary students from Timor-Leste to study in Australia. More needs to be done to achieve the vision that the people of Timor-Leste 'have opportunities to access a quality education that will allow them to participate in the economic, social and political development of their nation'<sup>6</sup>.

**Recommendation:** *That the Australian Government offers greater assistance to support the development and implementation of language and literacy programs in Timor-Leste to help the nation achieve its educational aspirations.*

### **Food Production and Security**

UoM and UNTL are working together to identify areas where staff and students can collaborate in relation to food production and food security in Timor-Leste. Since the MOU was established, UoM consultants have suggested that this item be expanded to include water sanitation, access and policy<sup>7</sup>. The food security program has been led by the Director of the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute (MSSI). In 2011, MSSI convened a workshop, in collaboration with UNTL, for UNTL academic staff, representatives from the Government of Timor-Leste<sup>8</sup> and relevant NGOs to identify where UoM and UNTL researchers can collaborate on food production and supply chain issues in Timor-Leste. UoM is continuing to investigate future opportunities within the partnership to address food production and security in Timor-Leste.

### **Risk and Hazard Mapping**

With the oversight of the Director of the Melbourne Energy Institute (MEI) and in partnership with the Government of Timor-Leste, UoM is developing a program that looks at research areas of common significance. This work is part of MEI's mandate to engage on sustainable energy issues in the Asia-Pacific region. MEI has worked with and through UNTL to build links with relevant government departments and institutions in Timor-Leste, such as:

---

<sup>6</sup> From the AusAID [Strategic Planning Agreement](#)

<sup>7</sup> Inspired and encouraged by the successful ARC Discovery Grant *Reconnecting with Water: Lessons from a Diverse Economy*. This project investigates the ways in which water use and management is understood and practiced by local peoples in Timor-Leste, and the ways in which these understandings and practices are and can be better integrated into policy. The Chief Investigator for this grant has been nominated as a potential theme leader for this portion of the MOU.

<sup>8</sup> Including the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Forestry and Community Development

- The Secretary of State for Natural Resources
- The Secretary of State for Environment
- National Disasters Management Directorate, which is under the Secretary of State for Social Assistance and Natural Disaster

As a result of this work, a program is being developed to build capacity in the area of effective natural hazard management and energy infrastructure planning. Due to Timor-Leste's location, topography and vulnerability to cyclic climatic events (ENSO oscillations), natural disasters pose a great challenge to infrastructure planning, especially in the area of energy production. Working closely with Timorese scientists, the program will build capability in the prediction and management of natural disasters and provide tools, such as maps and databases, to aid the planning of much needed infrastructure.

To date, MEI's work with the Secretary of State for Natural Resources has produced the first post-independence, publicly available geological and natural hazard maps<sup>9</sup>. MEI, in conjunction with the Social Justice Initiative at UoM, also funded and supported research that produced the *Climate Change and Energy Poverty in Timor-Leste* report<sup>10</sup>. UoM hopes to encourage and enable greater staff and student interaction between MEI and UNTL.

### **Conclusion**

UoM's history of numerous and varied interactions with the people and institutions of Timor-Leste provides a strong foundation for future growth. We value these relationships and are working to diversify and strengthen our connections with Timor-Leste and the Asia-Pacific region. Our partnership with UNTL provides opportunities to engage more meaningfully beyond our existing connections. Universities are diverse institutions with access to a wide range of interdisciplinary expertise. They are national resources that can be drawn upon and supported to strengthen regional and international relationships. The support of the Australian Government will allow both UoM and UNTL to achieve greater impact beyond our sector.

**Recommendation:** *That the Australian Government supports greater engagement and collaboration between Australian and East Timorese universities.*

---

<sup>9</sup> Available for free download from <http://www.timorhazardmap.org/>

<sup>10</sup> Accessible online at the Social Justice Initiative [website](#).



**Contributors:**

Professor John Hajek  
Director, Research Unit for Multilingualism and Cross-Cultural Communication  
The University of Melbourne

Ms Sabina Robertson  
Arts Librarian  
University of Melbourne Library  
The University of Melbourne

Professor Mike Sandiford  
Director, Melbourne Energy Institute  
The University of Melbourne

Associate Professor Robyn Sloggett  
Director, Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation  
The University of Melbourne

**Prepared and Submitted By:**

Jacob Workman  
Partnership Consultant  
Melbourne Engagement & Partnerships Office  
The University of Melbourne