Submission No 108

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

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Australian Government

Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

Secretary

Helen Williams AO

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The Secretary
Foreign-Affairs Sub-Committee
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry into Australia's relations with Indonesia

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (the Department) made a submission to the Inquiry on 31 October 2002.

Following the 5 August 2003 public hearing conducted in Canberra as part of this Inquiry, the Department is making the attached supplementary submission.

This supplementary submission is intended to provide further information on the cultural aspects of the bilateral relationship and, in particular, to explain the Department's relationship with the Australian Government's cultural agencies and their respective roles in promoting Australia's culture abroad.

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Introduction and summary

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (the Department) provides strategic advice to the Australian Government on cultural matters and supports the portfolio cultural agencies in meeting their objectives. The Department has an interest in international cultural affairs and is represented on the Australian International Cultural Council (AICC), established by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer MP. The Minister for the Arts and Sport, Senator the Hon Rod Kemp, is also a member of the AICC.

While the Department advises the Australian Government on issues relevant to the promotion of Australian culture internationally, it does not have direct responsibility for the delivery of programs to promote awareness of Australian culture overseas. This responsibility lies with a number of the national cultural agencies. A list of agencies is at Attachment A.

The Department's key objectives in relation to the arts and cultural sectors are to encourage excellence in, and access to, cultural activities in Australia. The Department also influences international cultural relations through its work with the national cultural agencies and as a provider of policy advice to the Minister(s) and other portfolios on matters of cultural import.

The national cultural agencies operate at "arms length" from Government. The "arms length" principle underlies much of the Government's cultural policy. The Department supports the twelve cultural agencies, ensures compliance with key accountability requirements and is, as stated above, a significant source of advice for the Minister. There is a deliberate emphasis on the independence of the agencies to pursue their cultural activities in accordance with their objectives. In the case of this Inquiry, this "arms length" approach is illustrated by the level of international engagement that agencies have chosen to pursue.

The Department is aware that Indonesia has a flourishing and vibrant arts sector and that organisations such as Asialink, AusHeritage and the Australia Indonesia Institute are active in encouraging cultural exchange, in the South East Asia region, and in particular, in Indonesia. The national cultural organisations are either members of (in the case of AusHeritage) or in regular contact with these organisations.

The National Cultural Agencies and Indonesia

Within the parameters of broader Government policy, the portfolio's cultural agencies set their own priorities for engagement with other countries. The level of engagement is dependent upon whether appropriate infrastructure exists and the level of interest in Australia and its cultural activity within a particular region.

Countries in which there is such an interest or "market" for Australian cultural activity present an ideal environment for collaboration and cultural exchange. For example, the National Library of Australia's (NLA) submission to the Inquiry highlights a long and productive relationship with Indonesia, which culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the NLA and the National Library of Indonesia in 2002. A more recent development is the National Gallery of Australia's (NGA)

exhibition *Sari to Sarong*, which is the culmination of liaison with experts and relevant organisations from the region over many years. This collection is largely drawn from the NGA's important collection of Asian textiles and is widely regarded as one of the finest in the world, particularly in the area of Indonesian textiles.

Indonesia has not, at present, been identified as a key target market for all of the portfolio agencies. This is based on the decision by agencies to capitalise on their presence in existing markets and to build on relationships that have been developed within a particular region. As the Australia Council's submission to the Inquiry indicates, the Council undertakes a range of activities in a number of Asian nations on this basis. Agencies also prioritise their activities in order to build on existing networks while establishing new links with other regions where appropriate infrastructure exists. For example, the Australian Film Commission is focussing on China as an emerging market, given China has one of the most sophisticated film industries in the world coupled with an enormous consumer base.

National cultural Agencies' submissions to the Inquiry

The national cultural agencies are responsible for activities to promote Australian culture overseas and, where relevant, for making submissions to the Inquiry.

The Department is aware of submissions made by the National Library of Australia, the Australian National Maritime Museum and more recently, the Australia Council. ScreenSound Australia, now integrated into the AFC, contributed to the Department's initial submission. The NGA has advised the Department that it will be making a submission to the Inquiry based on recent activity in the region, including in Indonesia, through the *Sari to Sarong* exhibition.

The Department has been advised that a number of portfolio agencies have not made submissions to the Inquiry. For example, the National Archives did not contribute a submission to the inquiry on the basis that its activities are currently focussed around the Pacific Island nations such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji. The Archives has advised, however, that it would be receptive to a request for assistance from the Indonesian Archives and has recently liaised with the Malaysian Archives on this basis.

The National Museum of Australia has advised that it is focussing its attention on building a strong national profile. The Museum's international activities to date have been limited to an exhibition to China in late December 2002.

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ATTACHMENT A

National Cultural Agencies

Australia Business Arts Foundation Ltd
Australia Council
Australian Film Commission
Australian Film, Television and Radio School
Australian National Maritime Museum
Bundanon Trust
Film Australia Ltd
Film Finance Corporation Ltd
National Archives of Australia
National Gallery of Australia
National Library of Australia
National Museum of Australia