



Submission No 37

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

Organisation: Friends of Baucau



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Friends of Baucau (Inc.) submission to Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into Relations with Timor-Leste

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make this written submission to the Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into Relations with Timor-Leste. The submission takes the form of brief points relating to each of the Terms of Reference.

Friends of Baucau (FoB) request the opportunity to elaborate on these points via presentation at the proposed hearings.

Background

Friends of Baucau began more than 12 years ago bringing together people from the Cities of Darebin and Yarra with the people of the District of Baucau in friendship. Today Friends of Baucau is a not for profit community association of people who live in Darebin and Yarra and a partner association of representatives from all of the 11 suku (village) councils that make up the sub-district of Baucau town and surroundings in Timor-Leste.

We began as an association of local governments, the two municipalities of the Cities of Yarra and Darebin in Australia with the District Administration of the whole of Baucau. More recently, while retaining the full support of the local governments in Darebin, Yarra and Baucau, we have become an independent association of citizens. In Baucau, following an election process supported by FoB and the Baucau Administration, the Xefe (Village Head) of each of the 11 villages as well as sub-district administration, line ministry and church representatives now make up the executive of *Unity, Action and Progress (UNAP) Baucau*, the community association partnering with us.

The core of our partnership is an ongoing exchange between the people of our respective communities. We understand a friendship partnership to be about supporting citizens of both our communities to appreciate each other's stories, cultures and values, to learn better to live a healthy life, to relate positively to all levels of government and to contribute to and benefit from well managed and appropriate services. We also recognise that each association has its own autonomy. So while FoB provides funds for activities and capacity building, we do so in a manner that leaves all local decision making to the elected association in Baucau Timor-Leste.¹

¹ This approach is consistent with the Principles of Aid Effectiveness as articulated in Paris (2008), Accra (2010) and Busan (2012).

Our partner association, *Unity, Action and Progress (UNAP) Baucau* calls on us to provide support for what they identify as their communities' own priorities, things that they are committing their own resources to as well. In recent years this has taken the form of:

- Exchange visits both ways to learn about each other's strengths and capacities and to build relationships of trust between us. These include visits by community leaders and members, artists and technical advisors.
- Capacity building for village leadership and management, including through the provision of office equipment and training in the use and maintenance of such equipment.
- Capacity building for management of grants programs through providing a block grant or subsidy for each village to engage in community driven development activities. We call this a friendship bond because the use and management of this subsidy is entirely up to the village councils and the UNAP Executive
- Training opportunities for youth, through scholarships and subsidies to attend workshops.
- Financial support to rehabilitate a Neighbourhood House, pending the development of their own strategic plan for its future use.

Submission points relating to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

Friends of Baucau believes that the Australian Government should carefully consider the following proposals relating to the current Parliamentary Inquiry Terms of Reference, and implement appropriate action in developing its ongoing engagement with Timor-Leste.

1 Bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government levels

- i. Negotiate in good faith and under the terms of the UNCLOS with the Government of Timor-Leste over the sea boundary between the two countries. Any such negotiation should remain quarantined from the wider bilateral relationship between the two countries.
- ii. Identify in negotiation with Timor-Leste, and in consultation with existing and potential investors and developers, the full range of ways to ensure Timor-Leste gains maximum sustainable developmental benefits from exploration and exploitation of the undersea resources in the joint areas of interest of the two countries.
- iii. Give official recognition of the role played and the substantial sacrifices made by the people of Timor-Leste in supporting Australian military forces in 1942 and the impact on them of other actions taken in defence of Australia.
- iv. Re-name the Australian Development Scholarships to Timor-Leste students in recognition of the role played by the people of Timor-Leste during the Second World War, and as a continuing reminder of the historical and close continuing relations that exists between our two countries and their peoples.
- v. Provide resources for greater exchange of people and perspectives on decentralisation, democratisation and the strengths and limits of local government.

2 Aid, including support with governance issues

- i. Commit to continuing the current levels and extent of its aid program to Timor-Leste, and to regularly updating the aid program and its focus in consultation with the Timor-Leste Government.

- ii. Commit to continuing a substantial focus on direct and indirect support for rural and peri urban communities outside of the capital.
- iii. Include an integrated focus on supporting the participation in all development opportunities of women, the poorest people, people with a disability, ageing people and others who are marginalised or disadvantaged.
- iv. Support the processes of decentralisation and the promotion of democratic governance.
- v. Identify greater opportunities for people-to-people contact or citizen organisations in both countries to participate in the aid program – notably through extending models of cooperation between citizen organisations of both countries that already exist in AusAID programs for other countries such as PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and multiple countries in Africa.
- vi. Provide the opportunity for subsidised volunteer support programs to work more closely with village communities and sub-district government - at the moment such placements are not available or very limited.
- vii. Develop additional programs to support disengaged youth especially in rural areas to promote greater national security, better managed urbanisation and increased opportunity for rural economic development.

3 Economic issues, including trade and investment

- i. Encourage and support Australian businesses to invest in Timor-Leste, especially in employment creation industries such as agriculture, food packaging, food transport and the creation of wholesaling and retailing networks for Timorese agricultural products, and tourism.
- ii. Support and extend Timor-Leste Seasonal Workers and training programs in Australia.

4 Cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges and People to people links

- i. Encourage and support community-to-community relations between Australia and Timor-Leste, through Friendship Groups, service organisations (e.g. Rotary), church groups, cultural and artistic groups, educational/school tours and other people to people relations.
- ii. Encourage and support community-to-community relations between Australia and countries of the ASEAN and Pacific Islands Regions, including particularly Indonesia as Timor-Leste's most influential neighbour.
- iii. Promote cultural links between Timorese and people from the North and North West of Australia – including Island communities in Australia.
- iv. In addition to the scholarship schemes for students to do degree study in Australia, give financial support to student exchange programs which allow Timorese students to spend a semester or a year in an Australian institution as part of their degree studies at a Timorese university.

5 Defence cooperation and those aspects of regional security that affect Timor-Leste

- i. Encourage and support Timor-Leste to develop security forces and capabilities commensurate with its needs and capacities.
- ii. Develop a clear defence and security position and capability for Australia in cooperation and consultation with partners including with Timor-Leste, Indonesia and other countries of the ASEAN and Indo-Pacific Regions.

Conclusion

We present this contribution to the Inquiry based on over 10 years' experience actively exploring, developing and expressing a particular locally focussed international community-to-community partnership. There are many other friendship relationships involving communities in Australia and Timor-Leste, each with their own identity, processes and learning.

Important features of the Friends of Baucau approach, and that of many other such friendship groups, are that they embody respect for the international partner community and its capacities, and focus on long-term mutual relationships that build on the strengths of both partner communities. This focus on locally driven, strength based local development provides the opportunity to gain a realistic perspective on the impacts of other larger development assistance efforts and to complement these in areas the larger programs struggle to reach in any effective and sustainable way.

This approach has proven itself in facilitating positive changes within both the international and Australian partner communities. The Timorese communities and Government can enthusiastically speak for the benefits they see. The benefits in Australia include enabling Australian citizens to gain a better understanding of another culture and its political-economic environment, become better informed about aid and development issues, to contribute to the development of positive international relationships and to Australia's international development efforts, but also to better engage within their own community and with their local government.

Yours sincerely

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On behalf of Friends of Baucau Inc.

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