



Submission No 41

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

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

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

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I have had a long association with Timor-Leste, going back to my first visit to Portuguese Timor in January 1975 to carry out research for my Monash Masters' thesis.¹ I met many of the Timorese leaders then, was a founding member of the Australia-East Timor Association, helped Jose Ramos Horta set up the FRETILIN office in New York and while working for John Langmore Member for Fraser and Senator Olive Zakharov in the mid 1980s, helped Ramos-Horta and other Timorese make representations to members of your Parliament. I am just now completing a book on Timor-Leste's transition to independence which includes chapters on policy-making and the economy, reconciliation, gender issues and education as well a discussion of the emergence of the governance structure including the Constitution. It will hopefully be published by ANU e-press this year. I will comment on the topics you have specified in your Terms of Reference. The views in this submission are my own and do not reflect those of any organization I am associated with.

Bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government levels

Australian Parliamentarians and government officials often do not realise that Timorese remember that for 24 years the Australian government (and indeed all political parties) supported the continuation of the Indonesian occupation. While the Timorese appreciated Australia's willingness to mount a 'coalition of willing' to send peacekeepers into Timor in September 1999 they were very disappointed that after independence the Australian Parliament (not just the government parties) voted in favour of the Greater Sunrise Unitization agreement on 28th March 2004 depriving the new Timorese state of revenues from major areas of the Timor Sea which they believed, on good advice, that they had a right to under international law. While the then Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri was able to negotiate a so-called 'creative solution' with the Howard government in the CMATS Treaty and improve the level of those revenues considerably, this required putting on hold the recognition of Timor-Leste's maritime boundaries for 50 years which many Timorese feel is an infringement of their self-determination. There is now distinct a possibility that the current government of Timor-Leste could walk away from that CMATS treaty with Australia if it does not feel it is getting a fair deal from the Australian companies involved. It has established its own oil company and is working with companies from many other countries.

Australian officials in Timor need to know the history of Timorese attitudes towards Australia why they exist, and need to make particular efforts to convince the Timorese that Australia's role has changed, they cannot just assume it. Of course there have been some outstanding Australians posted to Dili who have made great strides in developing favourable attitudes; these are usually the ones who have made the effort to read widely on Timor-Leste's history, politics and culture.

Parliamentarians on short term visits often need to be better briefed than they are, particularly on the debates around the Constitution, and not assume that a Westminster system would be a better system than the one the Timorese have. Interestingly most Timorese of all political parties are now most proud of their Constitution and there is little in the way of demands for change, even the language policy which at the time seemed controversial. Many Australians played a role which was not regarded as constructive during the debate on the language policy. Most Timorese now regard their language policy as beneficial although there are many debates about how it should be implemented which is proper in a democratic society.

¹ Published much later as *Stirrings of Nationalism in East Timor: FRETILIN 1974-1978*, Otford Press, Otford, NSW.

Aid, including support with governance issues

My critique of aid in Timor-Leste is similar to my worries about aid anywhere else; this is that the large bilateral projects are overwhelmingly delivered by private consultancy firms who charge huge fees and often do not give good value for money. Nevertheless there is some good aid given outside these structures, a great deal of it very small scale and relying on initiative of civil society organizations in Timor-Leste or Australia to come into existence. It is another observation of mine that so-called 'governance' is one of the most difficult fields in which to implement successful aid projects. In July 2011 I was the main organizer of a joint Victoria University – National University of Timor Loro Sa'e (UNTL) conference in Dili entitled 'Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills for Timor Leste's Development', it was based on the premise that knowledge, attitudes and skills are more important than money in determining the success of a particular project. The conference had seven parallel streams, agriculture and rural livelihoods, law and justice, formal education, health, infrastructure and national systems, financial inclusion and popular and adult education. We resisted having a separate stream on Governance because it appears in Timor that if you get the policies and systems right and design good programs which depend on enthusiastic Timorese with knowledge, attitudes and skills conducive to development, then governance will take care of itself. Separating it out as a stand alone factor I have discovered can be a money-wasting trap. This does not mean that workshops on good governance for civil society organizations or government departments are not necessary, and that study of organizational dynamics is not important, but they should not be separated from the big picture nor the practical skills in the organizations field of work, communications skills generally and the building of leadership from the very basic level.

I know my views on this may be controversial, they are partly informed by my work in the Pacific Islands (at the Commonwealth Youth Program in Fiji where I delivered a Diploma Course on Youth and Development from 1987 to 1990). I had previously become involved in the early debates in Australia about Gender and Development.² In particular I became aware of the difference between women's practical needs, which for years had been supported by aid programs, and women's strategic needs, which were the one's which would empower them on an equal basis with men.³ Now what surprised me when I came back to Timor in 2000, after working in the Pacific, was that in most countries of the Pacific women's practical needs had been prioritised while their strategic need lag behind (few Pacific Island countries have more than one woman in the Parliament for example). But in Timor-Leste it was the other way around, for various historic reasons, which I have documented in the book published by the Timor-Leste Studies Association⁴ Timorese women's practical needs were lagging far behind their counterparts in the Pacific Islands, particularly when it comes to maternal mortality, literacy, access to cooking technology etc. But it is not just the women who suffer from this. Rural villages as whole have not benefited as one would have expected from technology, public transport, knowledge which can enhance the quality of rural life in particular sustainable and pleasant housing. I believe housing to be a major contributing factor to some of the conflict which makes good governance in the rural areas difficult and which has led to various 'refugee' flows at times of destabilization.

² I wrote one of the early articles on this "The Impact of Development Policies on Women", in *Wealth, Poverty and Survival: Australia in the World*, edited by John Langmore and David Peetz, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, pp. 67-90.

³ The originator of these terms was Carolyn Moser in her book *Gender Planning and Development Theory, Practice and Training*, Routledge, London, 1993.

⁴ See 'Gender Issues in Timor-Leste and the Pacific Islands: 'Practical Needs' and 'Strategic Interests' revisited' in Leach, Michael, Nuno Canas Mendes, Antero B. Da Silva, Bob Boughton & Alarico da Costa Ximenes (2012), (eds.), *New Research on Timor-Leste, Peskiza foun kona ba Timor-Leste, Novas Investigações sobre Timor-Leste, Penelitian Baru Mengenai Timor-Leste*, Swinburne University Press, Hawthorn.
http://www.academia.edu/2106571/Gender_Issues_in_Timor-Leste_and_the_Pacific_Islands_Practical_Needs_and_Strategic_Interests_revisited

Australia regards itself as a leader in the international agricultural field, yet unfortunately it has not seen fit to support the pathbreaking International Assessment of Agricultural knowledge, science and technology for Development 'Agriculture at a Crossroad' released in 2009.

www.agassessment.org/ Bilateral agricultural assistance to Timor-Leste is rather one-dimensional restricted only to the Seeds of Life organization which promotes a 'Green Revolution' philosophy of agriculture. Given that Australia is home to other significant agricultural movements including Permaculture and LandCare it is a pity that these two organizations have not been given support through bi-lateral aid at the level that the Seeds of Life organization enjoys.

Economic issues, including trade and investment

The basic economic resource in Timor-Leste is the land and its people. Australians need to understand that the majority of Timorese are subsistence cultivators; the biggest question Timorese face is what should be the relationship of these subsistence farmers to the cash economy? How can they benefit from having a stake in both? There is an attitude among some educated Timorese that the subsistence sector must disappear for Timor-Leste's economy to progress, yet more and more they are coming to a realization that if it were not for subsistence production many Timorese would starve. One of the biggest threats to Timorese self-sufficiency in agriculture is the change in food habits which took place during the occupation, leading to a high demand for white rice and a lowering in status of traditional root crops and local vegetables. Many debates need to be held in Timor-Leste about food, agriculture, cuisine, nutrition and the development of internal wholesale and retail markets in diverse food crops. It is a difficult issue. Coffee farmers are not making enough from their coffee crops to make it rational to plant them, yet they continue. Ermera, the biggest coffee growing area is also the area of greatest hunger.

Cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges

Australians need to realise that, despite Portuguese and Tetum being official languages there is a great desire to learn English and indeed it forms part of the curriculum in all high schools, although unfortunately it has been taught very badly in the recent decade due to reliance on an old Indonesian curriculum which did not encourage good learning habits, or correct usage, and which emphasised curriculum which emphasised grammar to the exclusion of literature, poetry drama and such activities which normally play a role in high school language classes. The difficulties of overcoming this legacy are great and it is good to see Australia has finally, after a long period of negotiation, established a high quality learning program in the Department of English at UNTL. This could have been done long ago had the people in the Australian government been more aware of the language sensitivities of Timorese.

AusAID's program of scholarships and awards is one which Victoria University has benefited from considerably, in particular the Australian Leadership Awards (Fellowships) which give the university an opportunity to select participants and tailor a program exactly to their needs for a period of up to three months. While this is labour intensive work we have done it twice with great success, as a result we now have a body of Timorese at the National University who have been to Melbourne and who we can work with very well on our joint biennial conferences. Another program which was very cost effective and which had surprisingly good results was the Endeavour student mobility scheme under which six young Timorese undergraduates from UNTL spent a semester in 2007 at Victoria University doing courses in Community Development or Education. While the living allowance was scarcely enough for them to survive on and sadly the program was discontinued as a result, these six students benefited markedly and are all in much better positions in their careers than they would have been had they not spent the semester in Australia. If some thought was given to reviving this program it could benefit many more Timorese than are currently able to benefit from the AusAID scholarship program. The relaxed English language entry levels, while making it difficult in the first few weeks for these students, in the long run did not pose a

problem and eventually one of them gained work as an English interpreter on his return to Timor, having never studied English formally in higher education!

Victoria University has also been able to benefit from our Australian students going to Timor-Leste under the Endeavour student mobility scheme in faculties such as Education and Engineering where lecturers have accompanied a group of students during the semester break who have worked with Timorese students in High Schools for their teaching practice. This year a group of Engineering students and lecturers will visit Timor-Leste and hold joint classes with Dili Institute of Technology. We also have a number of self-funded students studying in Timor-Leste, I teach a unit at Victoria University 'Timor-Leste, History, Politics and Society' delivered every second year as a study tour, for undergraduates and Masters' students. In alternate years it is taught on campus so that Timorese students in Melbourne may do it, as otherwise they rarely have a chance to study the history, politics or sociology of their own country.

This experience of providing international students with 'contextual units' whereby they can link their other studies, be they in accounting, engineering or teaching, with the study of their own society, has helped many of them focus on areas of activity or employment when they return home. There is a danger that in many Australian universities there are lecturers who have little appreciation of what sort of a society these students will return to and apply their knowledge, a contextual unit such as 'Timor-Leste, History, Politics and Society' makes explicit the search for such linkages while they are still undergraduates, educates the other lecturers about Timor-Leste and makes the transition to work easier when they return home. We are aware also that students employability when they return home would be further enhanced by making available classes in Portuguese and good written Tetum which some of them are missing out on while being in Australia.

As Victoria University now has so many Alumni working in various fields in Timor-Leste it is now these graduates who provide most of the content for the study tour version of the unit when Australian students visit their workplaces in Timor-Leste, the study tour has proved to be an excellent form of people-to-people exchange. At present it is the responsibility of the students to fund themselves or take loans from the university, under a properly funded two-way student mobility program many more Australian students would be able to avail themselves of such opportunities and it is in keeping with the Governments' 'Asian Century' philosophy although Timor-Leste is not one of the countries figuring highly in the government's White Paper.

People to people links

Timor-Leste's way of coming to independence following 24 years of occupation was unusual. Many Australians had been part of the solidarity movement for self-determination, opposing their own government's policy and when independence finally came many were interested in continuing to have a close relationship with Timorese as their struggle for self-determination became successful and they entered into their new struggle for health and literacy, against hunger and for better access to education. There were also many among them who saw Timor-Leste as a possibility for a different type of aid relationship, one where people-to-people relationships might figure larger. Opportunities for people-to-people links have been provided through many civil society organizations in Australia such as Rotary and other service clubs, Scouts, Churches and the residentially-based Friendship Cities program launched initially in Victoria and now a world wide phenomenon. There will no doubt be many submissions from such groups to the Parliamentary Committee, my observation would be that these groups need better ways of learning from each other and identifying good practice on local development issues. It was for this reason and I and some of my colleagues from Victoria University and the Australian National University initiated the 2005 Conference 'Co-operating with Timor-Leste' in Melbourne where four Timorese Ministers

among others addressed this issue.⁵ This has been followed up by two more conferences in Dili conducted in collaboration with the Naitonal University of Timor Loro Sa'e, with a third to take place in July 2013

Defence cooperation and regional security

Australia has a legitimate interest in peace in Timor-Leste as in all of its neighbouring countries. Unfortunately the education system in Australia does not focus sufficiently on these close neighbouring countries and there have been costly military interventions and diplomatic stadoffs with several of our neighbouring countries as a result.⁶ While Timor-Leste was an experimental laboratory for 'Peace-building' and similar concepts due to having been the location of a UN Peackeping mission, yet there are other, older concepts around in the Pacific Islands region from which Timor-Leste could benefit greatly. One of these, talked about a great deal in the 1980s is the concept of 'small 's' security' – denoting all those aspects which make life secure such as access to food, housing, health services, education etc. as compared to 'capital 'S' security' defined in military or strategic terms.⁷ There is a gender component also to small s security and women have often advocated it in many countries. However it is not widely understood in Timor-Leste as the current usage of the term there is influenced by reference to the so-called 'security sector', meaning usually the army and the police. For example Timor-Leste has difficulty integrating its concept of food security into a broader concept of security or of establishing a housing policy that would see itself as contributing to greater human security.

Australia needs to respect the right of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste to build alliances with whoever it chooses to help with development or defence. It was pleasing to see that Parliamentary Secretary Richard Marles signed an agreement with the Government of Cuba on co-operation is support of Health services in Timor-Leste and some of the Pacific countries, such co-operation with other countries, even those viewed with suspicion by our allies, can help break down regional rivalries. I would hope that the Parliamentary Committee can make recommendations about other fields of co-operation which Australia can implement to the benefit of the Timorese and Australia's own standing in the region.

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⁵ See the special issue of *Development Bulletin* 68 edited by Helen Hill and Pamela Thomas published by the ANU which was a record of the conference at <http://www.crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/db-68.pdf>

⁶ For further evidence of this see the 2009 report of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Pacific Studies <http://www.aaaps.edu.au/?q=node/2> I was President of this Association from 20010-2012.

⁷ See Tony Siaguru, 'Small s security for small island states' in David Hergarty and Peter Polomka (eds), *The Security of Oceania in the 1990s: views from the Region*, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, ANU, Canberra, 1989.