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24 MAR 2004

TT 2 March 2004
Submission No:17.....

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**COLIN BARLOW'S IFAD PRESENTATION TO THE TREATY
COMMITTEE CONSIDERING THE IFAD CASE, PARLIAMENT
HOUSE, CANBERRA, MARCH 8TH, 2004**

First of all, I want to say that I do not, and never have had, financial connections with IFAD, either personally or through organizations with which I have been connected. I am an academic at the ANU, but have spent most of my life working in national government and NGO-initiated rural development schemes in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. I am also the President of an Australian NGO promoting village-level rural development in eastern Indonesia, but stress that my views are purely personal.

In my activities with Indonesian, Malaysian, Philippine and other government programs over several decades I've been able to closely observe IFAD (and other multilateral bank) rural development activities in various national and regional contexts.

IFAD has always appealed to me because of its concentration on what I call real rural development and poverty alleviation. This is development focussing directly on rural communities, working through community participation rather than community direction, and tailoring sponsored activities and provision of new technologies to the suggestions, capacities and situations of farmers and others who largely manage projects themselves. This is a slow but sure development process, which in the longer run when IFAD has gone can enable people concerned to continue working at improved levels on their own.

IFAD's approach certainly represents a crucial specialist development 'niche' which, despite counter claims by our government, is rarely held by other multilateral development organizations engaged in rural development. These other organizations almost invariably adopt a top-down approach, which in the long run is far less effective.

IFAD's approach entails the active engagement in development not only of local government and community groups, but also of local national NGOs. This engagement of grass-roots groups is demonstrably very effective, although often time-consuming in initial stages. While few Australian or other donor country NGOs have been involved in IFAD's efforts, there is plenty of scope for more of the ample Australian expertise in agriculture to be harnessed in this way.

It is, on the other hand, far easier to work almost exclusively, as most multilateral development organizations do, through national government departments which administer programs through centralized hierarchies, basically telling people at field level what to do. This is usually costly, in that substantial funds are siphoned off in administration. It is also much less directly effective or sustainable.

I cannot, in the short time available, give more than one example of IFAD's field approach. So I only quote IFAD's 'PIDRA' scheme in Indonesia, which is currently undertaking broad-based agricultural development in Java, Kalimantan and Nusa

Tenggara Timur. This scheme is working towards agricultural and poverty alleviation in just the way described, and although only going three years is already producing extremely positive results in increasing living standards. PIDRA is so impressive, indeed, that the Indonesian Minister of Agriculture, Professor Bungaran Saragih, is now using the approach as a model for a far wider Indonesian rural development program. The Indonesian Ambassador, H.E. Imron Coton, has made a submission to this Committee and wanted to be here today, but has unfortunately had to go to Jakarta. I could tell similar stories from Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, Burma, Laos, as well as from China and India.

Ladies and Gentlemen, over 50 percent of peoples in our Southeast Asian region, and indeed in developed countries as a whole, still rely on agriculture and live in rural areas. Why should we withdraw from the only international organization devoted exclusively to the rural development field, and with a demonstrably excellent record of achievement. To me, such withdrawal is manifestly against Australia's interest.

March 8th, 2004

(Colin Barlow)