



Submission No 35

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

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Organisation: Australian Volunteers International

Australian Volunteers International response to Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste March 2013



1. AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL (AVI)

Australian Volunteers International (AVI), formerly Overseas Service Bureau, is one of Australia's iconic organisations and Australia's largest and most experienced international volunteer sending agency. Since 1951, more than 10,000 assignments have been completed in 68 countries throughout Asia, Africa, the Pacific, Latin America and the Middle East.

AVI is a global leader in connecting people and organisations internationally to learn from each other and achieve shared goals. It achieves this by providing opportunities for Australians to volunteer to live, work and learn in partnership with people of other cultures. People centred development is central to this. Volunteers contribute to developing communities and bring a reciprocal benefit to Australia.

AVI affirms that central to this purpose is the belief that all people should have access to resources to meet their basic human needs, the opportunity to achieve their potential, and a right to make decisions about their own development and to participate in the development of their own society.

AVI's strongly-held perspective is based on the strengths of our 60+ year program built upon the following components:

- providing long-term, cross-culturally sensitive and effective technical assistance which builds lasting relationships with developing countries
- placing volunteers in response to locally identified needs and who will work in partnership with the local organisation under the management of the local employer
- working in partnership with local employing organisations to achieve the building of capacity of local institutions, good governance and civil society, particularly through the strengthening of public and community sector planning, management and service delivery
- providing volunteers who are aware of the cross-cultural dimensions of their role and are adaptable and open to two-way learning from this dynamic experiential learning process, generally up to two years
- maintaining a strong commitment to the importance of direct people-to-people links in affecting development that is appropriate, effective and sustainable and builds international learning and links between the two countries, and
- facilitating the integration into Australian culture and life of the individual and collective cross-cultural experience and understanding gained by its 10,000 returned volunteers.

2. CONTRIBUTING TO TIMOR-LESTE

AVI has been closely involved with Timor-Leste since before the ballot of 1999. AVI's approach of finding ways to respectfully support Timorese agendas rather than designing and managing its own programs has earned a profound trust amongst Timorese at both elite and grass-roots levels.

Since 1999, AVI has mobilised and supported 475 skilled professionals to work in Timor-Leste. Approximately 75 percent of these were participants in the Australian Government supported volunteer program currently known as Australian Volunteers for International Development

(AVID). Seventeen percent were also supported by the Australian Government through the Staffing Assistance Program for East Timor (1999-2001). The remainder were through a variety of smaller projects. Currently, AVI mobilises 10 skilled volunteers a year to Timor-Leste through AVID and continues to identify activities to engage with civil society, support decentralisation and foster youth leadership.

In preparation for a likely ballot result endorsing independence for Timor-Leste, AVI conducted a skills audit of the Timorese diaspora in Australia in May-June 1999. Survey instruments in English, Tetum, Portuguese, Bahasa Indonesia and Hakka were used along with community meetings in all major centres in Australia. This work was done in close coordination with CNRT (National Council of Timorese Resistance) the peak body of Timorese organisations striving for independence.

As a result of this skills audit, AVI enabled many highly credentialed Timorese to return to Timor-Leste initially as volunteers. In consequence, AVI enjoys close connections and a high reputation amongst influential Timorese. Some of these have achieved Ministerial positions (Emilia Pires, Isabel Guterres and Joao Goncalves), others important civil service roles (Vicki Tchong) and yet more are civil society leaders. In April 1999, AVI was invited to participate in the "East Timor Strategic Development Planning Conference" which was conducted in Melbourne under the auspices of CNRT.

2.1 Ballot and transition

Between 1999 and 2003, 48 assignments were filled for the UN, initially as Polling Officers in UNAMET (United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor) and subsequently as Field Officers in UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor). The Polling Officers were part of a large international contingent mobilised by United Nations Volunteers (UNV). In recognition of its experience in Indonesia, AVI was requested by UNV to provide briefings on the nature of the Indonesian military to the international contingent of Polling Officers in Darwin.

2.2 Government and civil society

From the inception of AVI's work in Timor-Leste, Australians have been assigned in large numbers to work in capacity development roles with Timorese civil society organisations as well as government agencies. This remains a feature of AVI's program.

In 2008, AVI in conjunction with FONGTIL (Timor-Leste NGO Forum) and RMIT's Globalism Research Centre organised a nation building conference in Timor-Leste. The conference aimed to bridge the sharp divide between urban and rural communities and was the first time civil society leaders from rural areas were brought together in a powerful demonstration of the vitality of civil society in Timor-Leste.

2.3 Decentralization

In addition to working with agencies of Timor-Leste's national government, AVI has also successfully worked with District and sub-district administration. As decentralization has become a more important focus of governance reform in Timor-Leste, this has become a significant element in AVI's programming. In most cases, this work has been supported by up to 10 Friendship Groups linking the communities in local government areas in Australia and Timor-Leste.

2.4 Youth Led Development Forum with East Timorese Youth Leaders

Australian Volunteers International has a partnership with Macquarie University to deliver their Participation and Community Engagement program (PACE). The flagship, whole of University program provides opportunities for Macquarie University's academics, professional staff and students to work with AVI's long term partners in developing communities to support their strategic aims.

AVI recently worked on a broader initiative with young leaders from Timor-Leste. The Youth Led Development Forum, in partnership with Macquarie University and the Rotary Youth Lead Leadership awards, was a three-day program held in February 2013. The program brought together young aspiring leaders from Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and Australia to share, learn and better understand ideas about Youth Led Development. The Forum involved bringing together key youth groups to be inspired by high profile local and international experts in development and learn practical skills in human rights and advocacy.

The Forum began with an opening address by Dimity Fifer, CEO of AVI and included workshops run by experts from the Diplomacy Training Program and The Voice Inc., a youth leadership organisation in PNG. The international keynote address by Serena Sasingian, Executive Director, The Voice Inc., was followed by a panel of distinguished speakers discussing youth and community development including: His Excellency Abel Guterres, Timor-Leste Ambassador; Emma Hess, Manager – International Projects at AVI; Dave Husy, Director of International Projects Plan Australia; Samah Hadid, National Director of The Global Poverty Project, and Professor Bruce Dowton, Vice Chancellor Macquarie University.

The forum provided an opportunity for young leaders from Timor-Leste, PNG and Australia to share their experiences and ideas about youth led development and understand their commonalities and differences as the future leaders of their countries. AVI hopes, from this initial successful forum, to develop an on-going program to support youth development in Timor-Leste.

2.5 Patron of AVI

Jose Ramos Horta has been a vocal supporter of AVI for many years and has recently agreed to serve as a Patron of AVI. His *Foreword* to the AVI Publication "*A Place in the World – Stories from Australian Volunteers International*" is Attachment One.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

Across the globe many donor countries support international volunteering programs which are also known as development work, civil service or technical assistance. Australia has been unique in its ability to combine the benefits of each of these elements of international volunteering as well as ensuring that a development education focus is not lost on the Australian community through the learnings of both the volunteer and the program partners.

There are a plethora of opportunities for Australians to volunteer overseas including substantial programs funded by the Federal Government and supported by Australia's Aid and Development and Foreign Policy. These include the Australian Volunteers for International Development

Program supporting short and long term volunteers and the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program.

International volunteering globally has seen a shift to:

- demand rather than supply led approaches;
- a focus on the organisational development of local host organisations;
- programmatic approaches focused on specific sectoral or issues eg. HIV/AIDS, rural livelihoods, governance;
- two way volunteering between donor and recipient communities;
- the call from local communities for specific rather than generalist expertise to fill placement requests; and
- the desire for more options to fulfil organisation needs in developing countries which may include research, leadership programs, access to project funds, networking opportunities, staff exchanges with organisations in donor countries to name a few.

Other trends that need to be factored into the new context for international volunteering are:

- the demographics of developing communities having very high youth populations;
- the desire from developing countries to build their internal capacity for volunteering;
- the desire from developing countries towards older international volunteers with professional skill sets and significant experience;
- the desire from large outward looking international corporations, government departments and community organisations in donor countries wishing to share their skills and expertise as part of a long term relationship rather than donate dollars;
- the increase in numbers of 'baby boomers' who wish to contribute their high level expertise and experience by volunteering; and
- the increase in youth organisations designing, funding and managing development programs based on youth-youth mentoring and development.

The new context for international volunteering has seen government aid programs worldwide expanded to reflect new development opportunities and challenges. British and Canadian Aid Agencies, Department for International Development (DFID) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), lead a wide field of foreign government aid agencies in their innovative and integrated approach to international volunteering, by funding organisational twinning programs, exchange programs, south-south and north-south volunteering.

Government funding of volunteering programs worldwide has expanded to reflect these developmental challenges with increases in funding for:

- organisational linkages or twinning;
- co-development where diaspora return to volunteer in their country of origin;
- north-south volunteering;
- south-south volunteering;
- regional volunteer program linkages; and
- focused programs linked to sharing expertise of donor country eg. public service skills.

Unfortunately the Australian Government's international volunteering program has not kept up to date with these initiatives and thus has not reaped the benefits of a more integrated and strategic mix of program options.

4. FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

4.1 *International volunteering - contributing to 'second-track diplomacy'*

International volunteering adds significant benefit to wider Australian foreign policy goals particularly in relation to:

- building demand led governance;
- sharing Australia's strengths in public service skills by working with sub national government infrastructure to build resilient and robust public service capability;
- linking with communities to give depth to international relations and understanding;
- reinforcing Australia's long term commitment to people-to-people relationships; and
- the practical expression of informal diplomacy and Australia's desire for good regional relationships, which is an essential ingredient for peace and stability in the region.

Australian volunteers have always been supported and encouraged by Australia's overseas missions. Foreign policy relationships are multi-dimensional and international volunteers assist this work by helping to break down cultural stereotypes in its relationships with overseas government and non-government organisations (relationships which have often extended over several decades).

Approximately 50 percent of Australian volunteers have been employed in the education sector, contributing at a wide range of levels including classroom teaching, teacher training, planning and administration, and curriculum and materials development. Such activities have a strong multiplier effect through the exposure of overseas students to Australian values, creativity, flexibility and other work-style attributes. Today, there are senior members of governments in many countries who were taught by Australian volunteers and who readily acknowledge the importance of those earlier relationships.¹

Government-to-government relationships with different countries can and do vary considerably over time. Ultimately however, strong relationships and the ability to resolve conflict depend to a significant degree on the strength, mutual understanding and respect embodied in relationships between people. The deterioration of relationships with Indonesia over Timor-Leste and, in previous years, volatility in the Australian Government's relationships with PNG, Fiji and the Solomon Islands are examples. Throughout these periods, Australian volunteers continued to develop direct and positive relationships and to achieve task outcomes.

4.2 *International volunteering - contributing to, and improving quality outcomes in aid, development and trade*

International volunteering's strengths lie in the sharing and gaining of experience and skills at the local level. At AVI, 60 years of practice confirms the original premise that ethical and sustainable development must be defined by local people, not the donor country and their needs.

Growing understanding of these imperatives has led to the recognition of the need for more participatory, people-centred and culturally appropriate approaches to 'development'. In turn, these approaches are translated into program design both by multilateral organisations and in government to government aid flows. In the case of the World Bank: *... we know that to be sustainable, development needs to be broadly inclusive ... too often in the past, the World Bank focused too much on the economics of growth, without a sufficient understanding of the social,*

¹ *The Contribution of AVAs to the Health Services of PNG 1964-1990*, AVI, 1993; AVI, 1998, loc.cit.; email from Cambodian MP and Government Minister Pen Siman (13 Mar 2002)

*the political, the environmental and the cultural aspects of development. Nonetheless, the Bank has recognised ... that development must be people-centred – that is, people must be the focus of the development agenda.*²

Further, in discussing volunteer capital as a new source of growth towards empowered globalisation, the World Bank articulates:

*Volunteer capital is as important as – and perhaps more important than – many other forms of capital participation in the development process. ... Human voluntarism as a new set of values and perspectives ... should become the principal guide to a new way of doing economic development.*³

*Indeed, ... volunteers are providing the services that the ‘egotistic’ market has decided to forget ... they correct the negative external effects of markets (local and global) and in the jargon of economists are correcting market failures.*⁴

Moreover, aid projects intended to facilitate ‘democratisation’ and ‘good governance’ but without due regard for local cultural context and social dynamics, have provided many salutary examples of flawed design and missed opportunity. As a result, such assistance has often been considered by recipients to be paternalistic and contemptuous of local processes. At worst it may be counter-productive and destructive in its outcomes (refer to Attachments 2 and 4).

*... the key to effective ... development work (is) acquiring a sympathetic understanding of the values and beliefs of local counterparts. What is important is ... the relationship that develops over time between the individual volunteer and the local populace. In those instances where the volunteer is perceived as empathetic with the local culture and interested in participating in it as fully as possible there is mutually beneficial influence.*⁵

Through the work of international volunteers, AVI has made an important contribution to the main thrust of Australia’s development cooperation program in Timor-Leste by providing much needed, experienced and cross-culturally ‘aware’ technical expertise to build local capacity and provide support for institutional strengthening at comparatively low cost (refer to Attachments two and four).

It is important to note that in many countries where Australian volunteers work, it has been a catalyst for or precursor to improvement or expansion in aid, development or trade relationships. AusAID has noted the potential for:

*... former volunteers to assist in the expansion of Australia’s commercial and trade interests in Asia and the Pacific.*⁶

Furthermore, Australian volunteers have played a significant role in peace-building work in Cambodia, Bougainville, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Afghanistan.⁷ AVI has

² Judith Edstrom, Sector Manager, Social Development Division of the World Bank, “Multilateral Reports: The World Bank”, *Social Development Review*, 3, 1, March 1999

³ Alfredo Sfeir-Younis, “Volunteer capital: a new source of growth towards empowered globalization”, *International Symposium on Volunteering – Final Report*, 2001, p. 13

⁴ Sfeir-Younis, op.cit., p.14

⁵ Dane Smith, “Building relationships – ending conflict through mutual self-understanding”, *Worldview Magazine*, National Peace Corps Association, Vol. 15, no. 2

⁶ *Review of Volunteer sending Agencies*, AusAID, 1995, p. 56

⁷ “From the Minister”, *Focus: The Magazine of Australia’s Overseas Aid Program*, AusAID, Winter 2002

been active in each of these countries, and others, prior to and after periods of conflict. In many cases, the program was maintained during periods of conflict. AVI has developed considerable expertise in negotiating the sensitivities of the post-conflict environment, and in managing the difficulties associated with sustaining individual personnel in socially and geographically isolated postings.

4.3 International volunteering - contributing to good governance and civil society

Good governance cannot be considered in isolation from the need to develop civil society and to address issues of equity, community participation, promotion of human rights, inclusiveness and recognition of the existing indigenous governance infrastructure. The strengthening of civil society cannot be achieved only through a government to government interface.

The link between good governance and strengthened civil society is increasingly important in light of the complex social, economic and environmental issues which affect Timor-Leste. It is also vital for the achievement of good governance, development and stability to ensure that communities have access to basic rights and services such as education. In situations such as this there is considerable potential for international volunteers (along with other community-focussed organisations) to provide practical support for good governance at the same time as facilitating civil society development.

Appropriate staffing assistance programs are another mechanism for supporting this process. They can add value to public sector reform programs by facilitating exchange of technical skills at the same time as building cultural understanding. The capacity to recruit and support personnel with the appropriate cross-cultural and technical skills is integral to the development of strategically focussed technical assistance programs.

Twinning programs are of high benefit in this context.

Twinning programs differ from other approaches to capacity building. They are dynamic and success is dependent on the strength of partnerships. These partnerships then provide the basis for establishing and sustaining strong bilateral and multilateral cooperation into the future. Twinning succeeds in capacity building because it is simple and harnesses current structures. It is sustainable because it is partnership based⁸.

The value of international volunteering through institutional twinning should not be underestimated in any strategic review or development of good governance, civil society and public sector strengthening programs.

4.4 International volunteering - contributing to cross-cultural experience and understanding in aid and development activities

The alumni of Returned Australian Volunteers provides a valuable pool of cross-culturally experienced and skilled Australians progressive in their attitudes about development cooperation and committed to working in partnership modes with people in developing countries. Many complete additional overseas assignments either with AVI or other Australian NGOs. Others work for commercial consultants engaged in the implementation of bilateral projects, are employed by AusAID or take up positions in foreign and multilateral development agencies. A study conducted for AVI by an external consultant showed that 29 percent of all former Australian Volunteers have worked in a developing country since completing their initial

⁸ APEC Twinning Implementation Essentials – A toolkit for APEC for a. 2008

volunteer assignment and 12 percent have worked in a government or commercial agency concerned with overseas development.

4.5 International volunteering - contributing to enhancing racial tolerance and racial harmony within the Australian community

National interests cannot be pursued without regard to the values of the Australian community, ... Central to these values is an unqualified commitment to racial equality and to the elimination of racial discrimination. The rejection of racial discrimination ... is fundamental to Australia's acceptance by, and engagement with, the region where its vital security and economic interests lie.⁹

Australia is a multicultural and internationally engaged society. As a result, Australian communities are dealing with the effects of more globally orientated economic and political perspectives as well as developing increased knowledge and sophistication in dealing with the cross-cultural mix that characterises Australian society. These changing requirements are an important stimulus enabling people to come to terms with, and celebrate, ethnic differences and their contributions to the continuing development of Australian society.

Fundamental to achieving this is the existence within the Australian community of people who have experience in living and working within other cultures or with people from different cultural backgrounds in Australia. Australian volunteers provide a significant resource in cross-cultural experience and experience of living and working in developing countries. For example:

There's a tradition of regarding volunteers as somehow part of our aid program. My experience of over 30 years tells me that they are very much more than that. Certainly, we do hope that Australians who come ... as volunteers, are able to help, to leave something behind, to show that they've made a difference. But more than that, there's no question that the volunteers take away at least as much as they leave and that Australia is a very significant beneficiary of that¹⁰.

People with this rich experience then need the will, the support and the means to pass on their experience and knowledge to others.

International volunteering works at breaking down stereotypes, encouraging mutual understanding, building networks with the people of other nations and projecting positive images of Australia. In particular, a key objective is:

... to reduce cultural distance and to encourage a greater two-way flow of people and ideas between Australia and its bilateral partners. Expanding cultural exchanges is an important part of this process.¹¹

Australia's image has recently been affected by international opinion concerning the Federal government's stance on contentious issues such as 'boat people' and refugees. There have also been claims of some unfortunate outcomes in Australia, for example, some Islamic communities have reported increased racial tension and acts of overt racism. In this context, the relationships, cross-cultural understanding and impressions made by Australians working in developing countries becomes even more significant.

⁹ DFAT, 1997, op.cit., p.iv

¹⁰ R. Smith., loc.cit.

¹¹ Federal Government White Paper, "In the National Interest", DFAT, 1997, p. 78

In its pre-departure preparation of volunteers, AVI puts major emphasis on developing the ability of volunteers to fit into and work successfully in the cross-cultural settings to which they have been assigned. The organisation's systematic reviewing of assignments on completion strongly supports the success of this approach and the long-term benefits to relationships between people of the two countries, the understanding in the Australian community of cross-cultural issues and, ultimately, to the broader relationships between countries.

AVI supports returned volunteers to become involved in community education and advocacy work in Australia, speaking from their first-hand experience of the complexity of aid and development issues, their relationships with people in developing countries and promoting the recognition and celebration of cultural diversity and exchange. One effect of AVI's work in this area is that four out of five returned volunteers have subsequently been involved in talking with community groups, briefing prospective volunteers or have participated in other AVI activities¹². In all of these kinds of activities they make a direct contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the Australian community.

4.6 International volunteering - contributing to positive images of Australia

A previous Federal Government White Paper stated that one area in which government and the wider Australian community (including NGOs) need to cooperate is in:

*Conveying a contemporary and positive image of a changing Australia... Unless others know us better, and we others, our relationships will remain limited and the capacity to pursue Australia's national interests diminished... For relationships to grow... they need a broad base.*¹³

Australian Volunteers provide an identifiable, positive, long term Australian presence at many levels in developing countries across a broad range of sectors and geographic areas. In daily interactions with people in their host community Australian volunteers share their values and beliefs and provide examples of Australian work practices and community spirit. Research indicates that, over time, memory of the personal qualities of Australian volunteers remains strong.¹⁴

The links developed between Australian volunteers and the people with whom they live and work are highly sustainable. More than three quarters of the volunteers on assignment between 1963 and 1996 (and 86 percent of those who were on assignment during the 1990s) said that they have maintained contact with people from the country where they worked as volunteers. It often takes many years for the fruits of these linkages to develop to their fullest and to result in broader, long term outcomes which impact on the wider Australian community.

¹² Reark Research, loc.cit.

¹³ DFAT, 1997, op.cit., p.78

¹⁴ AVI 1993, loc.cit.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) in its Final Report:
 - explicitly acknowledge the value and benefits of international volunteering in its ability to achieve significant positive outcomes across all of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference
 - recommend that the Federal Government leverage the benefits of international volunteering by funding increases to its International Volunteer programs, and
 - recommend that these programs become more strategic and integrate the new context of international volunteering and twinning programs.
- That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) recommend that the Australian Government incorporate the learning of Australian Volunteers and Timor-Leste host organisations into AusAID country strategies, funded programs and diplomatic relations.
2. That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) recommend the following program initiative to be funded by the Australian Government:
 - Respond to the administrative, policy and service delivery capacity needs of Timor-Leste's centralised public sector; district and sub-district administrations; village program and civil society organisations across Timor-Leste by **funding increased numbers of international volunteers, including from the Timorese diaspora community, in technical assistance, mentoring and capacity building programs.**
3. That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) recommend the following program initiative to be funded by the Australian Government:
 - Respond to the increased desire of Timorese and Australian professional organisations, peak bodies and community organisations to share expertise through two-way exchanges by **funding the establishment of a Timor-Leste – Australia International Twinning Program.** Such a program would be a key part of AusAID's Civil Society Framework which has as an outcome the strengthening of civil society in developing countries. This program could have the following characteristics:
 - Organisations in the Australian and Timorese business, government and community sectors can apply in conjunction with an AusAID funded Volunteer Program provider or AusAID funded NGO partner, for 3-5 year Twinning Program funding. To participate a Twinning Program Expression of Interest (EOI) is co-developed between the Timorese and Australian 'twins' is submitted for Phase One funding to develop the Twinning development plan.
 - The EOI must focus on funding the exchange of skills between staff of the two organisations and can incorporate funds for research, leadership and/or staff development programs and project funds related to capacity building. In this way a suite of options, via one simple funding mechanism, is available to ensure the best outcome.
 - Priority would be given to organisations that are linked to current development priorities eg. gender, environment, legal and local governance and/or needs which are

not addressed directly by other aid programs eg. disability, capacity building of peak community service bodies, youth development, peace building, sport, culture and art, allied and community health and health promotion.

- Funding for the Twinning Program will be in two phases to best ensure the quality of the organisational development plans and the viability of the linkage partnership.
Phase One: Resources for up to \$15,000 will be provided for the design of the comprehensive Twinning Development Plan. The plan must include a monitoring and evaluation component, be based on asset development principles and incorporate action research practice as far as practicable. Upon completion, submission and endorsement of the Plan funded in Phase Two would be sought.
Phase Two: Resources for the implementation of the life of the 3-5 year Twinning Program would be sought through a separate proposal process.
4. That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) recommend the following program initiative to be funded by the Australian Government:
- Respond to the new context for international volunteering by ascertaining interest within the Timor Leste government and, if interest is shown, **fund research in conjunction with the Timor-Leste government into the viability of a funded south-south volunteer program** between Timor-Leste and other developing countries particularly those in the G7+ community.
5. That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) recommend the following program initiative to be funded by the Australian Government:
- Respond to the issues of the youth of Timor-Leste by:
 - **developing and funding 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
 - **providing 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 - in addition to the scholarship schemes for students to do degree study in Australia.
6. That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) recommend **additional program initiatives to be funded** by the Australian Government which build and strengthen people to people links by:
- **Encouraging and supporting 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.
 - **Promoting cultural links between Timorese and people from the North and North West of Australia** – including Island communities in Australia.

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LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

ONE: AVI 50TH ANNIVERSARY BOOK – FOREWARD BY JOSE RAMOS HORTA

TWO: PERSPECTIVE OF AVI RETURNED VOLUNTEERS

THREE: AVI SUBMISSION TO AUSTRALIA IN THE ASIAN CENTURY WHITE PAPER

FOUR: ARTICLES FROM AV MAGAZINE (AVI's Biannual Magazine)

Finding a Women's Place, AV Magazine, Edition Two, 2011

Building Lasting Friendships, AV Magazine, Summer Edition, 2008/09

Commitment to a Nation, AV Magazine, Summer Edition, 2008/09

ATTACHMENT ONE - AVI 50TH ANNIVERSARY BOOK FOREWARD by JOSE RAMOS HORTA

As Australian Volunteer International enters its fifty-sixth year of service, more than 390 volunteers or 'AVIs' as they are affectionately called, have lived and worked in my homeland, Timor-Leste.

It is one of AVI's largest program in one of the world's smallest and newest nations, with Australians from all walks of life.

In my own name and on behalf of the Timorese people I publicly applaud AVI for its support and solidarity to my nation and to the cause of cooperation worldwide.

To each and every AVI who has lived in Timor-Leste and living here now, I say thank you, *obrigado barak*.

We Timorese have gone through some troubled times, a common characteristic of post conflict communities, in our case ever more marked with the inheritance of a decimated state.

AVI as a dear friend has stayed with us in all times going back to earlier periods and can be proud of the role it plays in the development of Timor-Leste.

The spirit and essence of AVI is its voluntary nature, one I commend, one which is strongly Australian as well. Your culture has a strong volunteer spirit and it is one that we in Timor-Leste wish to build on. It is a nice value to share by simply living it.

AVIs are wonderful Ambassadors for Australia, and indeed for the international community. The very nature of what you do gives expression to international cooperation, in the form of friendship. Friendship among families, communities, peoples and nations.

The friendships that are forged through the AVIs presence have long lasting benefits, promoting understanding across cultures and communities. In our case as near neighbours this is fundamental to our long term relationship building.

AVIs have provided services and skills in areas as diverse as agriculture, in dairy building up the herd and our own silk farm that includes the harvesting of our native trees for the dyes. LAHO produces some exquisite silk products. As well as building relationships these enterprises strengthen our local economy, a state undertaking dear to my heart. To that end I am establishing the President's Anti-Poverty Taskforce.

AVIs have worked directly with me, in my posts of Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, providing a valuable input into the processes of government and skills development within the Ministries.

I hope that this can continue! I salute you and thank you. God Bless.

José Ramos-Horta

President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

Nobel Peace Laureate

2007

ATTACHMENT TWO – PERSPECTIVE OF RETURNED VOLUNTEERS

Engagement between national and international civil society organisations and the Australian Government is critical to the advancement of universal values in our nation and our region. Their perspectives, expertise and partnership-building capabilities have been indispensable in the strong relationship between communities in Australia and Timor-Leste. Australian Volunteers International (AVI) has been a critical player in these diverse people-to-people links. The practical partnerships between AVI and Australian civil society organisations has mobilised the Australian community to improve human rights standards in Timor-Leste, helping align economic activities with social and environmental priorities.

As stated by one recent Returned AVID Volunteer

My personal and professional journey as a volunteer with AVI's Timor-Leste program was both challenging and rewarding. I worked with a Women's Cooperative in a rural community in the south-east for two years between 2010 and 2012. The placement gave me the opportunity for professional creative expression. It increased my capacity as a community worker as well as the capacity of the disadvantaged women I worked with. Many self-funded Australian volunteers joined us in our work and the success of our work was due to the effective collaboration between our two communities. This collaboration continues today.

AVI's programmatic framework and the support provided by staff during and after my placement was an enabling factor in our achievements. Although difficult at times, the placement increased cultural, political and social understandings and the bonds between our two communities. Importantly, this will support the experience and effectiveness of the next volunteer AVI sends to supports the cooperative's journey to self-sufficiency.

This work is an important part of Australia's commitment to Timor-Leste.

Feedback from Returned Volunteers to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference on issues not addressed in the body of this Submission:

1. Bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government levels

- Renegotiation of the sea bed boundary between Australia and Timor-Leste under the terms of the UNCLOS, with negotiations quarantined from the wider bilateral relationship between the two countries.
- 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.
- 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

- 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.
- Continuing a substantial focus on direct and indirect support for regional and rural communities.

- Including 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.
- Identifying greater opportunities for people-to-people contact or citizen organisations in both countries to participate in the aid program.
- Providing the opportunity for subsidised volunteer support programs to work more closely with village communities and sub-district/district government.
- Developing 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

- Encouraging and supporting 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.
- Supporting and extending Timor-Leste Seasonal Workers and training programs in Australia.

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

- Encouraging and supporting 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.
- Encouraging and supporting 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.
- Promoting cultural links between Timorese and people from the North and North West of Australia – including Island communities in Australia.
- Giving 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 - in addition to the scholarship schemes for students to do degree study in Australia.

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

- Encouraging and supporting Timor-Leste to develop security forces and capabilities commensurate with its needs and capacities.
- Developing 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.

16 March 2012

Submission: Australia in the Asian Century White Paper

Dear Mr Henry

Australian Volunteers International (AVI) is pleased to provide a contribution to the development of the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*.

Our recommendation draws on AVI's experience over 60 years, since the first international volunteer, the late Prof Herbert Feith left for Indonesia. Since that time, AVI has enabled thousands of Australians through first hand experience to develop a deep knowledge, understanding and empathy with people of Asian nations. Further, they have become significant interpreters of those countries' realities to the Australian community.

AVI's programs and activities have been reshaped and re-engineered over time, but the vision has remained relevant and cogent. For sixty years, AVI has experience in managing a range of programs and activities in the Asian region.

These include:

- Long term volunteer programs funded by AusAID in many sectors in China, Mongolia, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, East Timor
- Projects designed to develop capacity in Islamic education system in Indonesia (East Java and Aceh)
- Youth exchange programs (Indonesia)
- Community based mine action programs (Cambodia)
- District level mine action programs (Vietnam)
- Social forestry (Vietnam)
- Distance Education programs for Burmese refugees (Thailand)
- Midwife education (Cambodia)
- Youth programs (including indigenous Australian participants) to India
- Macquarie University student based programs (Malaysia, India)

The common thread in all of these activities has been building people-to-people relationships through an approach that emphasises reciprocity and respectful mutual learning. In January 2012, at a ceremony hosted by the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations, AVI was honoured with an award (and Friendship Medal) from President Truong Tan Sang for "its achievements in developing Vietnamese human resources and economic integration, contributing to strengthened solidarity, friendship and cooperation".

Most of AVI's activities have been funded in one way or another by government funding, and predominantly from the aid program. While acknowledging the benefits that accrues through people-to-people links being funded through aid and development programs, aid by nature is unbalanced in its power relations.

Furthermore, the aid program is turning its back on East Asia and increasingly on other Asian countries as they “graduate” from becoming aid recipients, in some cases becoming donors themselves.

In the “Asian Century”, more than ever before, it is inappropriate to promote people-to-people relations or Second Track “diplomacy” solely through aid modalities.

AVI recommends:

That Australian government funding be made available through the Foreign Affairs portfolio in sufficient quantity to enable the exchange of people, or other jointly agreed activities, promoting connection between young people, professional people, professional organisations and peak organisations to stimulate a broader range of people and community based foreign relations.

This should be outside of the architecture of aid and in addition to measures to promote trade. Professional or community based organisations in Asia do not see Australian aid organisations as their natural counterparts, but they are interested in engaging with organisations and institutions working in the Australian community, to share experiences and learn from each other.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned Beasley Intercultural to research and design an International Partnership (Twinning) Framework for Capacity Building in APEC economies. It was subsequently published by APEC in 2009. This Framework would be an excellent place from which to build an ongoing mechanism.

Twinning is a mechanism that promotes mutuality, peer-to-peer support and reciprocity. Twinning is a process of pairing like institutions, organisations or networks to exchange knowledge and build capacity on both sides of the partnership. Twinning is different to more traditional forms of international capacity building as it involves long-term partnerships, significant people-to-people linkages through transfer of staff and ongoing collaboration. International twinning often occurs in a complex cross-cultural context between organisations with varying levels of capacity and stakeholder engagement. Twinning crosses all sectors – government, community sector and corporate - and in all areas of endeavour –health, education, arts and culture, sport, environment, livelihoods, community services, research etc.

AVI has long supported organisational twinning as diverse Australian organisations (professional, local, service delivery, policy and research) can work with counterpart organisations in Asian countries on jointly planned programs of collaboration. International experience has shown that this practice plays a valuable role in developing capacity and promoting enduring relationships based on shared interests and concerns. A program of collaboration can encompass a variety of approaches to sharing expertise, technology and strategic thinking, including training, secondments, exchanges, and joint research.

Organisational twinning would significantly expand the number of Australian organisations who become stakeholders with an informed interest in Asia and Asia- Australia relations.

AVI is aware of the breadth of areas which your White Paper wishes to address. In this instance, we wish to recommend a practical and well-researched model of organisational twinning as a key part of any set of White Paper recommendations that focus on people- to - people relationships. Long term sustaining partnerships are key to the success of Australian-Asian engagement in the Asian Century.

I wish you well in your deliberations

Sincere regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dimity Fifer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dimity Fifer, CEO



Finding a women's place

Australian Volunteer Sustainable Livelihoods Coordinator Deb Salvagno and Mana Elsa De Oliveira, a member of the Lautem Women Cooperative - Cooperativa Tais Kultura No Dezenvolvimentu (CTKDS) work together in Los Palos in Timor-Leste at CTKDS. They talk to AVI's Fran Noonan about rural women working towards progressing their development in the region.

Fran: *What were the motivations behind starting up CTKDS?*

Deb: Before I started my volunteer assignment, there were three women's groups whose common bond was the language they spoke (some women were also former resistance leaders), but they lived in isolated communities quite far from each other. Trying to work with disparate communities across borders is impossible, so we realised we had to have one centralised organisation that allowed the women to maintain the identity of their communities, while bringing them together as an organisation.

Fran: *What do you see as the reason for needing a women's cooperative group?*

Mana Elsa: Our culture is communal in nature. People do things together and preserving our traditions is important to us, so a cooperative structure is more aligned with how we organise in our villages. For women in our communities, finding work to sustain their families is difficult, so we hope that CTKDS can help them in this way.

We aim to empower women through the co-op so they can be involved in directing the development of their communities more broadly. Even women from rural areas who are

illiterate have a legitimate place in the organisation. One of the unique things about CTKDS is that there are many illiterate women in the structure that have large responsibilities. This provides them with dignity and respect, and allows them to participate in their own processes of development.

Fran: *What would women be doing in the community without CTKDS?*

Deb: If you're a young person in these communities and couldn't weave you would most likely be child-rearing and your husband would be working in the garden. Sometimes you may also collect things from your families' veggie plot. Many single young women are living in the villages without an education as it is very hard for women of this status to afford the \$500 annual school fees. There is a high school in the region, but around 75 percent of women are illiterate. For the lucky few that are able to speak English, it is a massive advantage, but it usually means as 'skilled people' they will leave their villages. Opportunities that are created through CTKDS are important for keeping skilled people living locally.

Mana Elsa: Looking after the family keeps women incredibly busy in rural areas especially as they have to tend their gardens,

collect fire wood and water along with looking after children. Sometimes when they become involved in CTKDS, their husbands pitch in and help them with their chores but other times they say things like 'you can't read why do you even bother getting involved in that organisation'. But CTKDS certainly offers these women a place and if we make this organisation a success, we will help reduce that kind of discrimination. CTKDS should feel proud that we can give these women a place and that the programs are relevant to their lives.

Fran: *How does CTKDS support women and sustainable livelihoods in the region surrounding Lospalos?*

Deb: The organisation acts as a foundation from which more sustainable livelihoods can be built. In the beginning there was a large focus on marketing handcrafts, such as Tais but as a result of this being export dependent and only bringing in small returns, the women decided to diversify their market, to improve the returns and gain additional profits to help pay for their children's education. Agriculture and increased crop production were identified by the women as an incredibly important way of improving their revenue; however not every single woman had an interest, the capacity, or access to land to participate in agriculture

projects - particularly widows. So we thought about different areas we could focus on to create more diversity, and what kind of mechanism would best suit the geographical location, the culture and the relationships between the three groups.

Mana Elsa: Due to the difficulties of living in rural areas, women have little opportunity, but if a women's confidence is improved by being involved in CTKDS, they won't feel shame and are likely to push themselves to be more involved, which of course strengthens their sense of self-worth as women. This is a key element of sustainability as the women have a passion for learning and they must run their organisation independently if CTKDs is to last well into the future.

Having an opportunity to work with Mana Deb has given me an insight into another nation and it's attitudes towards women. This exposure has motivated me to think deeper about ways to make the organisation sustainable, because if we focus on only one area of work in one geographical location, it won't be effective. Through a systematic approach, we have started to explore our own capacities, giving us a greater opportunity to participate and contribute to our own sustainable development.



Fran: Do you think the Tais (weaving) products are important in sharing Timorese culture and identity?

Deb: The Tais cloth is a traditional form of weaving created by the women of Timor-Leste, and an integral part of their culture and what women do within their communities. Having access to global markets is one way that can help generate more income, as without it the weaving enterprise wouldn't necessarily be sustainable. Tourists are always happy to come and buy a product once they've connected with the creator as they can better appreciate the cultural value, and are willing to pay a bit more. So how we access different markets is something we are exploring.

There's always that danger of commodifying or over commercialising a culture, but I guess it's up to communities themselves to make that decision.

Mana Elsa: Absolutely. Tais demonstrate women's capacities to visitors, and as a medium for development, weaving can inspire the public here in Timor-Leste to start thinking about who women are, about the role we play and about our importance in our society. We need to start examining the aspects of our culture that don't advantage women and focus on the aspects that give women power such as tais weaving.

Fran: How else does CTKDS benefit the three communities?

Deb: In addition to diversifying the agricultural market we've also started looking at other ways CTKDS can assist with positive development within the communities. To determine what the communities wanted we designed resources so that the women could do their own research and collect data from within each of their communities. After this we all sat down and analysed it together, and some of the main things that we looked at

were: education levels, ages of kids, how often they are sick and what are the most prominent illnesses. In doing so we can establish programs to target these areas and help improve the situations in each community.

Mana Elsa: Supporting women's rights is fundamental to economic development. I have a deep interest in my land and my nation but the thing that motivated me to originally become a defender of the rights of rural women in Timor-Leste was because I heard many stories about the victimisation of women during the struggle for independence. I was not a *luta nain* (directly involved in the struggle) but I learnt much about the sacrifices they made during the resistance.

Now, as an independent nation, many of the things we fought for have not been realised. This is why, for me, I'm prepared to sacrifice my personal interests to struggle together with rural women to realise our rights and to speak loudly about our dignity. This is a fundamental thing that the CTKDS has to do in order to help women in our communities; we have to help them find the confidence to create something that will last into the future. So many local projects have started and closed because of a range of issues, particularly access to new information and because we as Timorese women have never really been in roles of management and we have to learn how to do this.

CTKDS is also lucky because we have support from Australian women. In my dreams, I've wanted to work with women who are interested in supporting rural women as I have skills but I can't implement things without support. We're fortunate that we have an opportunity with women from a developed country to come and share their ideas with us.

Fran: Where do you see CTKDS heading in the future?

Deb: As a result of the positive development outcomes from CTKDS, I would love to see the co-op be an absolute beacon for appropriate and sustainable development - not just in Timor, but other parts of the Pacific. Building more sustainable livelihoods will result in more vibrant and confident communities, and by empowering women's groups in particular, villages can flourish without the dependence on Western intervention.

Mana Elsa: I would like to see CTKDS help more women all over the Lautem district become a strong organisation with women in positions of leadership to lead their communities. It's not going to be easy and this is why I want to stand up with my sisters to help them become more independent. Secondly, I want us to seek ways that demonstrate our capacity and inspire women who haven't joined us yet. I want to show them that together we can do things beyond our imagination.

The Australian organisation East Timor Women's Association provides significant support to CTKDS and Deb Salvagno's volunteer assignment.

This is a position of the Australian Volunteers for International Development program (AVID). AVI is working in partnership with AusAID to deliver AVID.

Opposite > (r-l) Australian Volunteer Sustainable Livelihoods Coordinator Deb Salvagno weaving Tais with her friend and colleague Mana Elsa De Oliveira, a member of the Lautem Women Cooperative - Coperativa Tais Kultura No Dezenvolvimentu (CTKDS) in Los Palos, Timor-Leste.

Above > Weaving beautiful Timorese handicrafts at the Coperativa Tais Kultura No Dezenvolvimentu (CTKDS) in Los Palos, Timor-Leste.

Photos > Louise Cooper/AVI

Building Lasting Friendships



*Lasting friendships are those that are based on mutual respect and collaboration, and are strong enough to overcome the obstacles of distance. AVI's Business Development Coordinator **Sofie Anselmi** reports on how these qualities are the foundation of friendships forged between AVI, Australian communities and our neighbours across the Timor Sea.*

» **S**ince 1999, around 60 local governments and community groups from around Australia have established friendly but formal ties with the people of Timor-Leste to assist Timorese communities to rebuild their lives.

AVI is a firm supporter of the Friendship Relationships. In fact, since Timor-Leste emerged as a new nation in 1999, over 450 AVI volunteers have contributed towards development in the country, many supporting the relationships between Australian local governments and Timorese districts and sub-districts.

The Friendship Relationships differ markedly from conventional donor and recipient relationships. More than program delivery, the relationships are built on trust between individuals and groups and give both parties opportunities to learn, change and develop as they work towards shared goals.

In June, these relationships were celebrated at the *Timor-Leste Friendship Conference: Strengthening Communities through International Friendship*. Over 200 Australians and Timorese delegates used the occasion to discuss the strengths and challenges of their relationships, and identified how they could further strengthen their communities.

For AVI, the conference offered a valuable opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the Friendship Relationships, and to be a part of ongoing discussions on the critical role of all partners in building a strong Timor-Leste.

It gave us a the chance to reflect on the outcomes and achievements of our partnerships with Friendship groups in Australia and Timor-Leste, including:

- > the re-establishment of the Suai Community Centre
- > a community clinic and kindergarten in Same
- > a training centre in Baucau, formed along the 'neighbourhood house' model
- > support for women bakers, scholarships for junior high students, and desks and blackboards and salaries for teachers in Baguia.

AVI's Country Manager for Timor-Leste, Glenda Lasslett, and I had the privilege of joining delegates representing more than 40 Friendship Relationships at the Timor-Leste Friendship Conference. We participated in formal and informal events over four days, spending valuable time getting to know each other better.

The significance of the event was marked by addresses from the President of Timor-Leste, Dr Jose Ramos Horta and the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, HE Xanana Gusmão, as well as speeches by Victorian MP, Rob Hudson, and President of the VLGA, Cr Beth Davidson.





Clockwise from top >

Trish Woodcroft-Lee, Friends of Baucau and Same, with Prime Minister of East Timor, HE Xanana Gusmão.

Sr Mario Soares, District Social and Economics Officer for Aileu, and AVI volunteer Chris Adams led discussion on the Aileu Friendship Commission.

Derarca O'Mahony, Friends of Baguia, with Leopoldina Guterres, English Teacher at Baguia Junior High School and long-standing member of Baguia Friendship Committee.

Barbara Godfrey, Friends of Los Palos and Uaimori, with Timorese conference delegates.

Clare Murrell, Friends of Baucau, and Mr Luis Guterres, former District Administrator of Baucau.

Photos > *Courtesy Richard Brown, Chris Adams, Kate Jeffrey and Glenda Lasslett.*



From the first steps in developing the Friendship Relationships in 1999, AVI has assisted partners in both Australia and Timor-Leste.

An unintended, but important, outcome was noted by a participant at the Conference dinner, who thanked the Australians for “bringing together Timorese people from the East and the West, who mixed, sang and danced in a spirit of friendship”.

The *Timor-Leste Friendship Conference* received support from many Australian and Timorese partners, including the Timorese Ministries for State Administration and Foreign Affairs, AusAID, the Victorian Government, AVI, and the Victorian Local Governance Association. In his speech to the conference, the President described the conference as the largest gathering of foreigners held in Dili since the Independence Day celebrations in 2003. <



For more information on how your organisation can establish a connection with communities in which AVI works, contact Sofie Anselmi on 03 9279 1741 or email bd@australianvolunteers.com.

Commitment to a Nation



*While working to strengthen the human resource activities of the Red Cross (Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste/CVTL) in Timor-Leste, AVI volunteer **Anne Halloran** found herself inspired by the commitment of her new boss and former AVI volunteer **Isabel Guterres**. Anne chats to Isabel, about her role as the Secretary General of CVTL, returning to rebuild her country and the important part volunteers play in this effort.*

» **AH:** Could you tell me something about yourself and where you come from?

IG: I was born in Viqueque, in the highlands close to the south coast of the island. After completing primary and secondary school in Timor-Leste during Portuguese times I commenced studying medicine at university in Indonesia. After two years I left Indonesia with the support of the Jesuit Order and went to live in Australia, where I returned to university, this time to study nursing. After graduating, I moved to Melbourne and worked at several hospitals, including the Royal Melbourne and Royal Childrens' Hospitals.

In November 1999, following the Referendum for Independence, I returned to Timor-Leste with the hope of contributing in some way to the rebuilding of my country. I was assisted and encouraged to do this by the Jesuits and the Sisters of Mercy.

AH: You were an AVI volunteer at one time and you still do voluntary work...

IG: 2001 to 2002 was a significant period in the early stages of rebuilding Timor-Leste and I was fortunate that I was able to become an AVI volunteer for that year as this enabled me to continue my work for the Jesuit Refugee Service in districts outside of Dili. I had become aware of AVI while in Australia and during my time as a volunteer was grateful for the support given by the, then, country

manager, Christine Perkins. During this period I also did some volunteer work with World Vision and Medicin Sans Frontières. This involved working towards delivering a health service to remote communities.

The role of volunteers continues to be important to the ongoing development of Timor-Leste, so I also continue to do some voluntary work. I'm a board member of several organisations, including Moris Rasik, a micro-credit organisation supporting thousands of women across 12 districts to set up and operate small businesses. This is a significant program because it is successful in enabling women in rural areas, where unemployment is highest, to produce an income.

AH: When did you become involved with the Red Cross?

IG: From 2002 to 2005, I was Commissioner of the CAVR (Commission for Truth and Reconciliation). My role was to support victims of the violence at the time of Independence, assist in the reception of people returning to their community and also help with community reconciliation for people who wanted to be part of the process.

I had been aware of the work of the International Red Cross (ICRC), and had also seen first hand the Indonesian Red Cross and Australian Red Cross at work and admired the way they provided assistance when

people needed it most. In 2002 I became a member of the Board of Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste (CVTL) and in 2006 was appointed Secretary General.

AH: Could you tell us about the development of CVTL and its role in Timor-Leste?

IG: When CVTL began in June 2000, the staff had already been working with ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross so they were familiar with the role and function of the Society. There was then and continues to be strong support for the presence of branches in each of the 13 districts and recruitment of members and volunteers. Assistance in developing CVTL and ongoing support is given by the ICRC and the Red Cross Federation including Australia, Austria, Spain and Japan.

CVTL is an important part of this developing nation and I believe it will continue to have an important role into the foreseeable future. I see it operating as an auxiliary body to complement the work of government, especially in areas of health.

CVTL currently employs over 100 staff nationwide, an increase of nearly 50 per cent since 2004. One of the current challenges is managing our human resources and we appreciate having an AVI volunteer to assist in building our capacity to meet this growing need.



AH: What key projects is CVTL currently involved in?

IG: CVTL has carried out water/sanitation projects in villages in all of the districts and others are in progress. Support for these projects is provided by several organisations including the Australian Red Cross and AusAID. We provide first aid training and first aid services on request at public events, such as the celebration of the restoration of Independence in May.

AH: How do you envisage the future of CVTL?

IG: One of our biggest challenges is being able to respond to the needs and meet the expectations of the broader community. We are still financially dependent on international donors with minimal local fundraising. My hope is that CVTL will become a self sustaining, high level functioning National

“One of the current challenges is managing our human resources and we appreciate having an AVI volunteer to assist in building our capacity to meet this growing need.”

Society with the capacity to deliver much needed services to the community. We aim to be the organisation of first response in the event of an emergency, such as a natural or man made disaster. I am particularly hopeful that the contribution of the young people of Timor-Leste will grow and blossom with the recent establishment of a Youth Red Cross, a process in which we were fortunate to have the assistance of the Australian Red Cross. <

Above > Isabel Guterres meets Noi, a local, from the Suai district. East Timor Red Cross delivered essential water and sanitation facilities in Noi's village with funding from Australian Red Cross.

Photo > Courtesy Australian Red Cross