



Submission No 46

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

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Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Over the past two years this Centre has been conducting a Project entitled *Peaceful Dialogue over West Papua*. The purpose of the project has been to promote dialogue about peace with justice among Papuans themselves and with representatives of the Indonesian Government. To pursue this objective we have been involved in meetings with senior Indonesian Government officials, with representatives of companies with interests in West Papua, with Indonesian based human rights organizations and with Papuan leaders, including ex patriates. However, the priority in this submission to the Joint Standing Committee concerns the means of establishing close relationships with Indonesian colleagues even if we do not always agree with one another.

Dialogue with Indonesian Representatives

The focus of this section of our submission concerns the significance of dialogue with colleagues who have represented the Indonesian government in Australia. From the Ambassador (Sudjadnan Parnohadinigrat) to the Consul General, it has not been difficult to establish trust and understanding. But to achieve this outcome has required a commitment to spend time together informally – discussing common life interests - before formal arrangements about West Papua could be addressed. Meeting one another with a degree of spontaneity, humour and hospitality has been central to the growing confidence in our relationships. Being on first name terms, knowing which parts of Indonesia our partners came from and being able to discuss the influence of their religious convictions on the nature of their own lives has been crucial to our sense of enjoying one another's company.

In early exchanges it was of particular importance to confound stereotypes about Indonesians, Australians or West Papuans. We discussed and discarded notions that Javanese are inscrutable and cannot be trusted, that Australians are arrogant and will seldom express views different from those of their allies in the United States or that Papuans are primitive and would not be capable of governing themselves. We wrote working documents on these issues and shared them with Indonesian colleagues, including West Papuans. This openness and sharing was crucial to our sense of respect and trust. There were occasions when we met only with West Papuans and our Indonesian colleagues then became suspicious that we were deliberately excluding

them. They resented this and complained to the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, in particular with regard to our bringing West Papuan leaders to Australia in September 2002. This is a reference to three days of workshops on peaceful dialogue among West Papuans, held at International House in Sydney. The suspicion that we were not being inclusive was then addressed in correspondence with the Australian embassy in Jakarta and with the Indonesian Directorate of Foreign Affairs. It was important to regain trust and to insist that our mode of operation was to be inclusive. This is an important point. Trust can never be taken for granted. Once gained it may be lost and has to be regained. The ingredients required to regain trust include regular communication, acknowledgment of mistakes, humour which conveys understanding, mutual respect and commitment to a common cause.

Civilian or Military Orientation

A crucial feature of our relationships with Indonesian officials concerned the distinction between those with a civilian or with a military background. Such different experiences produce differing world views. Our Indonesian colleagues with a civilian background reminded us that Indonesia's democracy was barely five minutes old, that the long years of Colonial and Soeharto control had given deep roots to military ideology and practice. Therefore every assistance was needed from friends outside Indonesia as well as within to foster democracy in every walk of life – in the openness of personal relations, in the equitable ways of running organizations as well as in the deliberations at the highest levels of government. In many exchanges it was acknowledged, 'There is no history of dialogue within Indonesia'. To explain this point, Indonesian officials referred to the use of violence to address problems within families, on the streets, in organizations as well as in relations with rebellious provinces. To respond to this point we discussed the desirability of running workshops in Jakarta or Bali about the values and skills which underpin dialogue between people of different cultures, religions, of different age and varying professional background. Our Indonesian colleagues showed enthusiasm about the prospect of establishing such Indonesian Australian workshops. And then came the Bali bombings of October 2002. Yet this atrocity has made even more imperative the need for dialogue about peace, humans rights, conflict resolution and the practice of non violence. Our civilian Indonesian colleagues would agree with this. They would welcome the opportunity to take such 'workshop initiatives'. The Indonesian and Australian Governments could give leadership on such a modest proposal. This Centre would be pleased to cooperate.

Contrast with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs

The spontaneity which we experienced with Indonesian diplomats and Indonesian NGO officials was not always repeated in our exchanges with our own Department of Foreign Affairs. Representatives on the Indonesian desk in Canberra seemed fearful of meetings and dialogue which did not appear to fall within fixed lines of foreign policy. For example, they recited the mantra that 'West Papua (Irian Jaya) is Indonesian'. On one occasion when we had arranged a meeting in Canberra to discuss the direction of the West Papua project, Foreign Affairs bureaucrats refused to allow a West Papuan leader into the Foreign Affairs building. It was a childish incident. The Department of Foreign Affairs officials seemed to think that their having a

conversation with a West Papuan leader would imply support for the Papuan independence movement. By contrast the Indonesians had no difficulty in meeting with this leader. Australian officials were implying that an initiative such as the West Papua Project in Sydney's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies was a dubious departure from official Australian policy and would only earn the ire of the Indonesian government. Our experience was the reverse. By being willing to experiment, to establish networks and relations with Indonesians, we were able to sow the seeds of respect and thereby gain insight into the needs and aspirations of Indonesians. They wanted us to be human. We needed to display a certain humility as expressed in a willingness to acknowledge that our understanding of Indonesian culture and the influence of Islam was limited. But we wanted to know more.

Dialogue with West Papuans

Dialogue with West Papuans is also an important feature of Australia's relations with Indonesia, in particular as West Papua is a very significant Indonesian province. The following observations will cover relationships with West Papuans in general. I will also make specific comment about the Indonesian Security Minister's observations about links between the West Papua 'peace workshops' held in Sydney in September and the murder of Americans and an Indonesian near the Freeport mine.

In our communications with West Papuans, it has always been important to recognize a diversity of views and experiences. Most may be united in the need for independence and in their continuing dismay at their betrayal by Australia, by the United States and by the UN in the so called 1969 Act of Free Choice. But there exist a range of views about the merits of cooperating with the Indonesian Government's proposals for West Papuan autonomy. Many West Papuan leaders perceive benefits from the autonomy proposals, yet there are different perspectives even on this issue. Highlanders and lowlanders, men and women, youth compared to their elders, Christians and Muslims, indigenous Papuans and new arrivals need to be consulted and their views respected. Dialogue about human rights and about the means of building a civil society has to ensure that diverse Papuan representatives are heard and that strong relationships of trust and mutual respect are established. If that does not happen, the West Papuans will perceive Australians' interest and involvement as distant if not patronizing. Shared hospitality – to West Papuans and from them to Australians – plus the humour so essential to dialogue has been a feature of the networks built with West Papuan representatives over the past few years.

Workshops in Sydney in September 2002 brought together fifteen West Papuan leaders in one place over three days and for the first time outside West Papua. The workshops were distinguished by a concern to discuss the philosophy, language and practice of non violence and its application to a country (West Papua) where military control and military inspired violence is an inescapable feature of people's lives. The West Papuans under the leadership of John Rumbiak and Benny Giay showed their own long history of settling differences through dialogue and other means of non violence. Through their tribal customs, through their religious convictions, the West Papuans know the significance of peaceful dialogue even though some of them may be stereotyped as military men who support the independence movement the OPM. In their relationships with representatives of the Indonesian government, our West

Papuan colleagues feel strongly that there is no alternative to the language and practice of non violence.

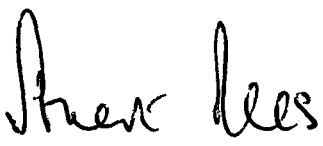
Specific outcomes to these peace dialogue workshops were concerned mostly with the need to establish reconciliation among West Papuans themselves. The following conclusions were recorded:

- (1) A stated willingness to include all parties in future negotiations about the quality of life in West Papua, paying particular reference to respect for human rights. 'All parties' to include representatives of civilian and military government, leaders from different religions and the representatives of major overseas companies.
- (2) In the next round of meetings, there is a need to address all issues of violence including the devastation being caused by Aids, the immigration of newcomers, the exploitation of a rich environment and the threat of fundamentalist Islamic groups such as Laskar Jihad.
- (3) Future peaceful dialogue should continue to explore key issues such as autonomy, well being – with particular reference to the treatment of women and children - power sharing, the meaning of civil society and 'free choice'. The importance of revisiting and reviewing The 1969 Act of Free Choice was seen as a crucial feature of the need to rewrite history. This issue was also seen as central to the development of open and honest relations with the Republic of Indonesia.
- (4) Resources are required to promote peaceful dialogue and to increase literacy about human rights. These resources will be only a fraction of those invested in military personnel and hardware but the returns will be considerable. When will politicians and governments learn to invest in policies of non violence and the means of effecting dialogues about peace with justice ?

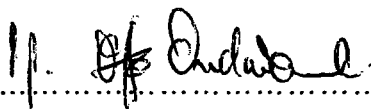
The August 31st killings near Timika, West Papua

From an Indonesian Government perspective, the alleged relationship between the peace workshops in Sydney in September and the killings in Tembagapura near Timika on August 31st may have seemed more than accidental . This Centre had chartered a plane from the Freeport mine to bring the West Papuan leadership to Darwin. That plane left Timika within hours of the killings. That was an entire coincidence. Nevertheless these events highlighted the different approaches being taken about governance. On the one hand the Indonesian military has violence as a modus operandi. On the other hand the West Papuan leaders were coming to Sydney to discuss the philosophy of non violence and in particular the means of reconciliation among their own groups. From the perspectives of the organizers of the peace workshops in Sydney, the Indonesian Minister's statements about the probable involvement of West Papuans and their supporters in the Tembagapura killings was a smokescreen designed to protect the Indonesian military, Kopassus. It was ironical that the time spent in Sydney discussing non violence and the means of conducting peace negotiations should be matched by a preoccupation with acts of violence back

in West Papua. While in Sydney the West Papuan leadership had ample opportunity on SBS and ABC television to explain their suspicions about the killings in their homeland. Leaders such as John Rumbiak were able to emphasize their commitment to solving problems through non violence. Such access to mainstream media is seldom afforded to a people from whom Australians can learn. These Papuan leaders know the merits of non violence because they and their environment have been subject to destruction, to killings and to other forms of violence throughout their lives.

Signed.....


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Professor Emeritus and Director

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John Ondawame,
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