



Submission No 56

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: Mt Evelyn Christian Fellowship

Contact Person: Pastor Jim Hughes

Address: PO Box 411
MT EVELYN VIC 3796

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE**

**SUBMISSION TO
THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONS
WITH INDONESIA**

By:

Pastor Jim Hughes

Pastor, Mt Evelyn Christian Fellowship

Principal, Mt Evelyn College of Ministry

On behalf of Mt Evelyn Christian Fellowship

Authorised by Pastor Allan Meyer, Senior Minister

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Pastor J Hughes

Mt Evelyn Christian Fellowship

PO Box 411

Mt Evelyn Vic 3796

Tel.: (03) 9760 8008 / 9736 2323

Fax: (03) 9736 1344

E-mail: college@mecf.org.au

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Background to the Involvement of Mt Evelyn Christian Fellowship in Indonesia

In August of 2000, our church received news from Indonesia that 20,000 refugees had flooded into the South Sulawesi town of Tentena. This followed fighting which broke out in May of that year, fuelled by Islamic extremists who were said to have plotted to kill every Christian over the age of 12. In the ensuing fighting, some 700 were killed and some 10,000 homes were destroyed. A Bible School in Tentena that was directly responsible for looking after 1350 of the refugees, had run out of funds.

On August 27, 2000, our church had planned a major offering to purchase property for expansion. Our Senior Pastor, Allan Meyer, believed that in the light of this need, God was asking us to give all of our property offering to assist in feeding and helping these refugees and others in South India where our church is also involved. All in the church agreed, and over \$250,000 was raised, approximately \$200,000 going to Indonesia, and approximately \$50,000 going to India.

Two of the elders from our church visited Indonesia to discuss proposals for the most effective use of the funds. It was agreed that along with provision of food, land would be purchased, on which a community of small homes would be built to house refugees and where community farms could be developed. This plan was implemented during 2000, 2001 and 2002. In March of 2001 and March of 2002, detailed reports were given to our congregation on the progress made.

In 2001 our church also sent a medical team and medical supplies for the refugees. Since February 2002, a medical team, from our church and funded by this congregation, has been working permanently with the refugees in a small medical clinic.

(See Appendix 1: Photos of this work)

Continuing concerns over the Indonesian situation

During 2001 and 2002, we continued to receive reports from various sources of ongoing terrorism and violence by Islamic extremist groups.

In 2001, Tentena was reportedly the target of a Jihad who, by November, had a strong military presence in Central Sulawesi. Reports of forced Islamization, manufacture of weapons and bombs, and mass destruction of homes and villages became frequent. In December 2001, churches throughout Australia joined in prayer after terrorist announcements that December would be a month of blood, and because 63,000 Indonesian Christians were trapped in the district of Poso, by heavily armed terrorists.

Following international pressure, the Indonesian government responded, sending troops to the area and averting further tragedy. This crisis was widely reported in the Australian media. By April of 2002, reports indicated that troubles continued in Sulawesi, had also spread to Ambon, in Indonesia's Moluccan Islands, and further into Papua. By August, events had once again escalated in Tentena, Poso, Ambon and Papua, with deaths and bombings in relation to militant Islamic activity. Then sadly, the terrorism surfaced in Bali with further terrible loss of life.

Our church is concerned that the stability of Indonesia will always be at risk while militant terrorist groups are at large.

Government Response Commended

We are aware that the Australian Government shares our concern over the situation in Indonesia, and has taken steps in the past to raise these concerns with the appropriate Indonesian authorities. The Malino agreement was one of the positive outcomes of such efforts. Unfortunately some groups continued in violent actions and terrorism. We support the Australian Government in its efforts to urge Indonesian authorities to be proactive in protecting the human rights of all Indonesian citizens.

This violence has continued to move ahead of Government action, resulting in further tragedy in Bali. The response of both the Australian and Indonesian Governments following this tragedy gives hope for a better future. Both seem resolute in their stand to prevent further terrorism and to bring to an end the freedom with which these terrorist groups have operated in recent years.

John Howard and Alexander Downer have shown in their actions and words, that they value the continuation of a working relationship with President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Hasan Wirayudha. One result of this high regard has been the formation of the Joint Investigation and Intelligence Team, suggesting greater willingness to cooperate by Indonesia.

Peter Costello has rightly stated, "Asia's security problems are our security problems," but as we work together with the people of Indonesia, we realise that we share more in common than just the security of our region.

A Practical Response

Provision of food, purchase of land and development of the community of small homes was the beginning of our involvement, followed by the sending of a medical team and medical supplies for the refugees. The medical team which now works permanently with the refugees at the medical clinic, describe their involvement: "God has put in us a deep love and compassion for refugees who have had to flee attacks by Islamic terrorists here in Indonesia. We serve a community of refugees from the Moluccas, which includes places like Ambon and Halmahera. We also serve refugees from Central Sulawesi. We oversee medical work among the tens of thousands of refugees, and this includes training community health workers in a six month course. Hospitals in Manado are very poor. Free treatment for refugees is rare, and hard to obtain." (*See Appendix 2: Medical team responses*)

Twelve of the refugees who had some history of schooling were trained in the first six-month community health course. They are taught about the body, how it works, different diseases, and diagnosis of common symptoms. As they finish, the trainees are able to help in the refugee camps and our team is able to concentrate more on training. "The task involves loving those who have been through so much horror. An average week will see more than

100 people come to the clinic. We often find ourselves crying with those that are hurting, the bereaved, the traumatised. Then we will rejoice with those who get well.”

One of the team is now developing a scheme to provide safe drinking water to the refugee camp. The camps are plagued by ill-health, but especially TB and Malaria. Many of the illnesses are caused by the stress and hopelessness that these people have to cope with. As a church-based team, we are concerned with a healing process that encompasses spirit, mind and body, and it is clear this is desperately needed.

As a church we are now looking at the next step. The initial funds have been used, but the need is still great for:

1. A bigger clinic or hospital—if the clinic tripled in size, it would be full tomorrow.
2. Funding for medicines.
3. Training of more health workers—to reach the thousands of refugees.
4. More funding for refugees to be able to access other hospitals, and for funeral costs.
5. More communities such as we built with our previous gift—the health of those in the new communities is vastly better than in the refugee camps and they are able to grow their own food.
6. Development of programs to counsel refugees in ways to cope with their trauma—and to have the hope to build a new life.

Application of Our Experience to the Relationship between Australia and Indonesia

How can we build a relationship with Indonesia that is positive and mutually beneficial? Our church has been able to help in a small way one small part of the population of Indonesia. We have helped in a humanitarian way, and this has had a major impact on those we are involved with.

Australia can make humanitarian assistance a key in building a positive and mutually beneficial relationship.

Our teams have come to value Indonesian lives as much as their own. The plight of these refugees matters to them, to such an extent that they are willing to help and train in a difficult environment. There is something about the response of those on the medical team that inspires us all. We know if that were us in the refugee camp, we would want people to respond to our plight. We would want people to show that our life was of value—to show that Indonesian people are worth taking a risk for.

As our medical team stepped out, their response has not just surprised people, but it has inspired others to join them and step out in similar ways. We have others looking to join the team next year.

Estimates of displaced people in Indonesia are as high as one million. It is clear from other areas of the world that such situations are not helpful to the healthy development of any nation.

The Australian Government already contributes millions of dollars of aid to Indonesia—could some of that be earmarked to send qualified Australians in the Health field to train health

workers in Indonesia? The experience of our workers is that there are many willing workers in Indonesian hospitals, but their standard of training is low in many cases. Our medical team has been able to train workers to help with basic health needs in a refugee camp. Could Australia develop a scheme which provides specialised training for Indonesian hospital staff, by developing a training hospital in Indonesia and providing grants to Australian health professionals to spend time teaching there? Developing a training program that functions in Indonesian hospitals would illustrate Australians' care and respect for Indonesians.

Many other churches are involved in relief and assistance schemes such as ours. Could government grants be provided to help us in proven schemes? To help support existing networks would be a more effective use of funding than beginning over, or duplicating established programs.

Obviously, as churches, part of our involvement in any nation is to assist the churches there to grow and be healthy, and to assist nationals with the Biblical training they request. We do not expect government assistance in such aspects of our work. However when churches are involved on a compassionate basis and completing tasks of relief and assistance which have proven effective over time, then government financial assistance would seem appropriate, and would enable many programs to continue to operate effectively and to grow. Help with transportation of medical supplies or clothing and tax deductibility for relief or assistance work could be ways for the government to encourage more people to get involved.

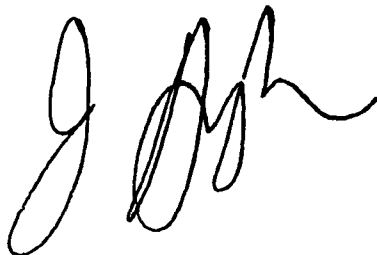
Freedom of Religion is Vital to the Stability of Indonesia

In Australia we value the right of people to be able to choose their beliefs and to express their faith in their speech and lifestyle. We realise that people may choose to believe different things, and that we might not always agree, but most agree that freedom of belief and freedom of speech are foundational to a healthy society. We sometimes assume that other countries stand equally for these foundational values, but situations such as those in Indonesia show that this is not necessarily so.

Prior to the involvement of terrorist groups, most of the different groups in Indonesia were living together without major trouble, and most desire a peaceful existence. In the past, the Australian government has given grants to promote racial harmony in Indonesia. Further initiatives could support freedom of religion. There must be a place for the promotion of freedom of belief and peaceful expression of faith. The freedom of the press in these matters could also be encouraged. Accurate reporting in both Indonesia and Australia is necessary for an ongoing and honest appraisal of the situation. The stability of growth and development in Indonesia and the long-term effect of all humanitarian effort there is dependent on the permanent establishment of these freedoms.

61 3 97361344

Author:



Pastor Jim Hughes
Pastor, Mt Evelyn Christian Fellowship
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Appendix 1

See photos attached



Appendix 2

Comments from Medical Team

Doctor

Our first work day completed and 200 people shown care and healing. This is the first of five camps we will be working. A total of 13,000 people! I marvel at the fortitude and good humour of these people, but the effect on their lives is told in the number of stress-related illnesses.

Occupational Therapist

We are challenged physically, emotionally and spiritually. The people here show genuine appreciation for the little we can do for them. I am constantly astounded by these people who have suffered so much. Necessities such as clean water, nourishing food and sanitation, need to be provided to improve their general health condition.

Registered Nurse

It was amazing that almost everyone came up to be treated. It was a joy to see their smiling faces, but sad to hear their stories.

Student

Today was a day full of experiences I am sure I will never encounter elsewhere. The number of people needing some care, both medical and on a more emotional level, was amazing. It is easy to forget where they have come from, and the horror witnessed by most, and think only of them as clients. Malnutrition is very common, and often kids of 1 and 2 years old look no bigger than a young baby. It is hard not to get attached to each and every person, but I hope we have been effective and made their lives a little easier.

Registered Nurse

A lady came to me complaining of heart palpitations and headache. "Especially when I worry about things" she said. Her hair was also falling out when she used a hair brush. Her symptoms were stress-related – no wonder! Like many of the people we were seeing, this lady had lost two of her children, killed by the jihad. These camps are full of more emotional pain than physical.

Dental Nurse

The dental team ran a very busy emergency room with approximately 30 patients attending for either extractions, scale and cleans, and fluorides.

Nurse

I found my greatest privilege was listening and encouraging those most traumatised. When they see our tears and concern they know that we love them. It is quite traumatic for the Indonesians on our team to see what is happening to their people.

Indonesian Nurse

I am very happy that I am able to be here in Manado and to be able to see for myself the situation of the refugees. Before I came I only saw them through video, on the TV, and the newspaper. Now I see the situation face to face and the reality of their suffering. I have come to realise that the suffering that I see with my eyes is very deep. I am grateful that through this team I can have a small part in what they are doing.