



Submission No 24

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

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**Submission to Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee of the
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
From Victoria University, Melbourne**

Victoria University has a long association with Timor-Leste, going back to 1999, when, in collaboration with the CNRT and funded by the Howard Government, VU hosted the first development conference. This submission will comment on the following terms of reference:

- Aid, including support with governance issues
- Cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges.

Background on Victoria University's involvement with Timor-Leste

VU Council member Jean McLean MLC visited East Timor in 1998 as part of a Parliamentary delegation, when it was still under Indonesian occupation and reported back to the University Council. Dr Helen Hill, a Senior Lecturer at Victoria University, had visited Portuguese Timor in 1975 for her MA research and had been involved in assisting the CNRT (*Conselho Nacional de Resistencia Timorese* National Council of Timorese Resistance) with its diplomatic work for many years.

Before the UN Ballot of 1999 had taken place Jose Ramos Horta visited Victoria University and requested it to help the CNRT organize a major conference on Strategic Development Planning for a future East Timor to be funded by the Howard Government. This took place at VU's City Campus in April 1999 and for the first time, brought together Timorese from inside the country and the Diaspora to discuss the future development of their own country.

Since then, Victoria University has held three more conferences with Timorese decision-makers and another is planned for July 2013.

Year	Title of Conference	Venue
1999	Strategic Development Planning for East Timor	Victoria University, Flinders Street, Melbourne
2005	Co-operating with Timor-Leste	Victoria University, Flinders Street, Melbourne
2009	Transforming Timor-Leste for Sustainable Development, Human Rights and Peace	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dili
2011	Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills for Timor-Leste's Development	National Convention Centre, Mercado Lama, Dili
2013	Future Directions for Food in Timor-Leste: improving Nutrition, Cuisine, Food Markets and Rural Livelihoods	Dili

Conferences on Timor-Leste which Victoria University has organized (the last three with UNTL)

In addition to the many Timorese students who have studied at Victoria University supported by AusAID scholarships, VU has provided other forms of training, in particular the Certificate IV and Diploma in Training and Assessment, a valuable qualification for anyone teaching in any field funded by AusAID's Public Sector Linkage Program. Timorese have also attended courses at VU under the Australian Leadership Awards (Fellowships) and the Endeavour Exchange Program. In addition, three students have studied at VU under scholarships given by the University's own Foundation. Several Timorese have also been given fee waivers by the university's English Language Institute. A group of vocational teachers funded by the Ross Trust came to VU for teacher training in 2005 and a further group was funded by the Victorian State Government in 2012. One Masters Student (who required Recognition of Prior Learning to be offered a place into his course) was given a scholarship to study at VU by the Government of Ireland.

One result of all this is that there is now a substantial group of VU Alumni in Timor-Leste who often meet visitors from the University when they are in the country and who increasingly are playing a role in helping the university determine its strategic priorities in Timor-Leste and in delivering content in our study tour unit 'Timor-Leste: History Politics and Society'. They have also been of great assistance to the university's Observer Missions to the Elections in 2007 and 2009.

Victoria University first signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Dili Institute of Technology (DIT) in 2002 and with *Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e* (UNTL the National University of East Timor) in 2005. These MOUs have since been updated and renewed and VU Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Dawkins was keynote speaker at the DIT Graduation in November 2012 and Pro-Vice Chancellor Di Mayer attended high level meetings with UNTL in February 2013. Victoria University has given support to the Department of Community Development in the Faculty of Social Sciences at UNTL, a department set up under the inspiration of Victoria University's own Community Development course. Several of the lecturers have spent time at VU under the Australian Leadership Awards (Fellowships).

In addition to Timorese studying at VU, many Australians have studied in Timor-Leste under the auspices of Victoria University. A regular study tour 'Timor-Leste, History, Politics and Society' at BA and MA level takes place every second year (alternating with the Conferences). Making use of the Endeavour Student Mobility Facility, a number of teacher education students have completed a practicum in Timor-Leste through the UNTL Faculty of Education and a group of Engineering students will do studies of sustainable architecture along with their Timorese counterparts, through a similar project at the Dili Institute of Technology later this year. VU currently has two Australian undergraduates studying for a semester in the Department of Community Development at UNTL's Faculty of Social Sciences.

Comments on Australia's Aid

As a result of organizing the UNTL-VU conferences, members of the VU East-Timor working group have become aware of a number of development issues of concern to Timorese academics, civil society organizations and students.

The quality, level, subject-matter and mode of delivery of education at all levels is of great concern to all. While it is understandable that aid donors prioritize education at the basic level, it is important if this education is to be made available to all at sufficient quality, that teacher education, work experience and high level management training for School Principals is available at the university. Maintenance of high quality schooling requires increasing teachers' professional knowledge and professional practice and enhancing their working conditions including appropriate remuneration. Attracting a high quality teacher workforce and keeping them in the schools is a major challenge for Timor-Leste and UNTL will need to play a major role in this.

As higher education is not currently a major focus of the aid program, Australian universities working in Timor-Leste often find it difficult to access the necessary funds to establish long-term partnerships with Timorese institutions for activities such as curriculum development and staff training. While VU has been able to avail itself of some small programs such as Public Sector Linkage Programs, ALA (Fellowships) and Endeavour exchange programs, collaborative work with Timorese universities would be much enhanced by the existence of a Higher Education funding window for Australian Universities. Countries, such as Canada, Portugal and the USA have more opportunities available for their universities to work directly with their counterparts in Timor-Leste.

Australia has chosen to spend most of its funding for higher education in Timor-Leste in Australia itself, with its Australian Development Scholarships (ADS) and similar programs. While in many ways they are excellent and well-funded, these scholarships are a high-cost alternative to funding good quality tertiary education institutions in Timor-Leste itself. To move towards this objective a more cost-effective mechanism would be to fund more Timorese exchange students, enrolled in Timorese universities, for one or two semesters in Australian institutions. VU has had good experience with exchange programs in both directions and the students concerned have benefitted greatly. We would recommend that AusAID seriously look at providing a more generally accessible facility which Timorese exchange students can access.

Victoria University as a dual mode university has had good experience in vocational courses in Timor-Leste, particularly with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. However there are several other TAFE specialities which would lend themselves to co-operation between Australian TAFE colleges and Timorese institutions including office administration,

accounting, information management (librarianship), electronics (particularly computer maintenance and repair) and hospitality and tourism.

Cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges and people-to-people exchanges

Victoria University through its conferences has a great deal of experience with educational, cultural and scientific exchange. The Timor-Leste Studies Association was established at our 2005 Conference in Melbourne and it has worked hard, with almost no funding, to establish collaborative networks with researchers on Timor-Leste from all over the world. Through our collaboration with the academics at UNTL in a number of Faculties and in CNIC (*Centro Nacional de Investigação Científica* – usually translated as National Research Centre) we have become aware of alternative views on a number of development issues within the university.

It is our observation that Timorese universities are greatly in need of more collaboration with their counterparts in Australia and need good facilities with which to do this, such as reliable internet access. The Australian universities' internet organization AARNET would be a good model for Timorese universities to develop their own such access. At present Timorese academics are dependent on commercial internet providers of variable quality. Most students have no internet access although a few visit private cybercafés to read emails. Further development of such a broadband internet network for academic purposes would facilitate educational collaboration and have spin-offs in many fields such as agriculture, health, information management (librarianship), teacher education and governance.

A funding facility to support more academic staff exchanges between Australia and Timor-Leste would also do a great deal to promote people-to-people exchanges and make the student exchanges mentioned above much more worthwhile. Exchanges in both directions are needed; the Timorese academics to come to Australia for a period to do curriculum development to learn more about participatory teaching methods and for further research, the Australian academics who teach Timorese students need to have more knowledge of the conditions under which the skills they teach will be applied. This applies to both TAFE and Higher Education sectors.

Victoria University is grateful for this opportunity to address a submission to the Parliamentary Committee and our officers would be happy to meet the Committee in person should they be interested.



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On behalf of Victoria University
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