



Submission No 25

## **Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste**

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Organisation: Aloia Australia

**Submission to  
Australian Parliamentary Inquiry  
into  
Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste**



ABN 20 132 184 050

Thank you for the opportunity to make this written submission to the Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste. Alola Australia Limited (Alola Australia) will address points 2, 4 & 5 of the Terms of Reference:

2. aid, including support with governance issues;
4. cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges; and
5. people to people links.

Alola Australia would like to speak further about the points made in this submission at the proposed hearings.

By way of background, Alola Australia was created by a group of Australian women and men committed to working for positive change in the lives of women and children in Timor-Leste. Our partner, *Fundasaun Alola*, was founded in 2001 by Kirsty Sword Gusmão to campaign against the widespread sexual violence against women and girls in Timor-Leste during the violence of 1999. The Foundation grew quickly to address the needs of women and children more generally and established successful programs in maternal and child health, education, economic development and advocacy.

Alola Australia was formed in July 2008 and promotes awareness of development issues in the Australian community and works in partnership with *Fundasaun Alola's* four key development programs that enable women and families in Timor-Leste to sustainably build a strong future.

Alola Australia is a small but effective organisation run by a Board of volunteer Directors with a large base of supporters across Australia and is committed to enabling and supporting *Fundasaun Alola* to undertake their work more effectively and sustainably. Our collaboration with *Fundasaun Alola* involves responding to issues they identify as important. Together we bring and build knowledge, experience and resources to address these priorities.

Alola Australia wants the Australian Parliament to know of this strong Australian community commitment to the women and children of Timor-Leste and believes that there are a number of steps that the Australian Government could take in supporting such Australian community initiatives as well as developing its ongoing engagement with Timor-Leste.

## **1 Aid, including support with governance issues**

- i. Continue the current levels and extent of its aid program to Timor-Leste in line with the priorities of and in consultation with the Timor-Leste Government. Thus providing the support and resources necessary to enable the Timorese to achieve their own goals.
- ii. Ensure that Australian aid focuses on promoting the participation of women and children in Timor-Leste.
- iii. Recognise that the interests of women, men and children are best served when local communities mobilise local community capacity to make sustainable changes to address poverty.
- iv. Ensure that funding for education and literacy, especially for women and girls remains an integral component of its aid program to Timor-Leste.
- v. Provide more opportunities for in-country scholarships, teacher training and mother tongue and Tetum literacy materials.
- vi. Include funding for child & maternal health by supporting the district based mother support groups and seeking to improve health facilities response to the needs of pregnant women, including access to ambulance services, health practitioners in rural areas and health centres.

## **2 Cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges and People to people links**

- i. Encourage and support community to community relations between Australia and Timor-Leste, through cultural and artistic groups, educational/school tours and other people to people relations.
- ii. Expand the scholarship schemes for students to do degree study in Australia, and give financial support for short term student exchanges.

Relationships are important in bringing about effective change and this particularly applies to relationships across national borders. The Australian community's understanding of the difference between welfare and effective development is growing. Alola Australia believes that every person has strengths and assets and the more a community draws on these strengths the stronger the community will be. The Australian Government's relationship with Timor-Leste should draw on the community's energy for change by appreciating the successes it has had in the past. Taking account of the fact that the Australian community cares deeply about Timor-Leste the Australian Government should continue to commit significant resources both financial and human to developing a strong relationship with this close neighbour.

Signed by



**Maria Bohan, Chairperson**

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