



Submission No 74

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: Victorian Indonesian Language Teachers Association

Contact Person: Ms Lisa Hill
President

Address: PO Box 2383
RINGWOOD NORTH 3134

Lawson, Cliff (REPS)

From: Cowan, Lesley (REPS)
Sent: Monday, 11 November 2002 12:17
To: Lawson, Cliff (REPS)
Subject: FW: NALSAS funding

-----Original Message-----

From: Brown, Heather Jo [mailto:brown.heather.jo@edumail.vic.gov.au]
Sent: Saturday, November 09, 2002 8:30 PM
To: Committee, JSCFADT (REPS)
Subject: RE: NALSAS funding

VILTA
 PO Box 2383,
 Ringwood North 3134
 Phone 9870 5546
 Fax 9870 5356

TO: Committee Secretary, JSCFADT,
 Department of the House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT
 2600

October 31, 2002

Re: NALSAS Funding

Dear Sir/Madam,

SUBMISSION to DFAT: Inquiry on Australia's Relations with Indonesia.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single footstep.
 We, the members of VILTA, request that the federal government make a clear
 commitment to

1. Reinstate NALSAS funding
2. Support Indonesian language programs in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.

Victorian Indonesian Language Teachers affirm wholeheartedly Peter Costello's impassioned plea last week for Australia to increase engagement with Asia. Australians are "enmeshed in the rich tapestry of Asia". The future security and prosperity of Indonesia and Australia are "inextricably linked".

High Court Judge Michael Kirby points to the need for initiatives that "bring citizens and nations together and enliven human engagement." Kirby refers to the work of Robert Putnam, Professor of International Affairs at Harvard, who has described the best indicator of liberty as "the extent to which citizens join together - in clubs and associations -"

The effective teaching of Asian languages is now a major issue for Australian schools. Many Indonesian public figures speak fluent English. Where are the Australian politicians who can reciprocate? It is not possible to have an adequate understanding of another culture without an understanding of the language. So many facets of culture are embedded in language. "We need to be in the conversation of the region..."

How do we interpret these views at the chalk face?

1. Schools are responsible for training and educating children who will tomorrow be players on the broad international stage. Productive 'engagement with Asia' means for teachers:

- * Maintenance and development of Asian language and cultural programs in schools;
- * Adequate support and on-going professional development for teachers of Asian languages;
- * Support for language exchange programs between Asian and Australian schools;
- * Support for the widest possible variety of communication networks between Asian and Australian schools;

* Integration of information technologies into the teaching of Asian languages.

2. Our job as teachers is to develop in children the skills to deal with an increasingly complex world. This must be in the context of an optimistic view of the future. Effective communication within the microcosm of the classroom and in Putnam's 'clubs and societies' should in the long term, help Australia be an informed and compassionate neighbour to countries like Indonesia.

All this means money. The Federal Treasurer could not fail to recognise the urgency of VILTA's appeal for the immediate reinstatement \$30 million of Federal funding for the teaching of Asian languages.

NALSAS funding was initially intended as a fillip to the development of a range of Asian language programs. This it achieved. However, given the paucity of school global budgets, these programs cannot be effectively maintained without Federal intervention. The immediacy of the need, as so clearly articulated by Peter Costello on October 16, cannot be denied.

VILTA recommends that **INDONESIAN STUDENTS** wishing to study in Australia should be

* Offered scholarships or incentives to study the liberal arts in Australian universities.

In April this year, former Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid, outlined two major challenges facing Muslim societies. Wahid identifies "an urgent need ... to develop a new approach to understanding Islamic law." Although most Muslims, according to Wahid, are strongly opposed to acts of violence, he acknowledges the dangers of groups within the Muslim world who "justify violence on the grounds that they are defending Islam against the tyranny of the uncivilised West."

Muslim nations around the world have ratified the Universal Declaration of Human rights, and espoused the right to freedom of belief and freedom of conscience. The growing tension between extreme and moderate interpretations of Islam is the basis for instability in our region.

Wahid identifies a "dangerously schizophrenic approach" to the education of young Muslims overseas (i.e. in Australia). Students from Indonesian and from many other Muslim countries are sent here to gain qualifications in science and technology. They are then faced with the dilemma of reconciling what Wahid describes as the "formulistic thinking" of their science studies with an understanding of their Muslim identity. Wahid believes that many of these students will apply to Islam the same "literalistic and reductionist" approach they have learned as students of engineering or other applied sciences. And this, he says, leads to young Muslims who are "unable to approach their faith with the intellectual sophistication that the demands of the modern world require of them."

Wahid is convinced that students studying the liberal arts will be much better equipped to lead their communities to withstand the forces of radicalism in their own countries.

Add to this volatile recipe the facts of poverty and unemployment. By 2004 it is predicted that 45 million Indonesians will be jobless. That is an increase of 5 million people from just last year, and double the current population of Australia. The jump in unemployment among educated Indonesians is predicted to be 2.56 million by 2004.

The tragic events of October 21 at Monash University can only serve to highlight the fact that we must take a fresh look at our relationships not only with Indonesia, but with Asian students who live and study in an environment that is too often alien and lonely.

Bridges must be built between Indonesians and Australians within this country. Stronger bridges may then form the road to Australia's productive engagement with Indonesia.

Yours sincerely,
Lisa Hill, President.

Important - This email and any attachments may be confidential. If received in error, please contact us and delete all copies. Before opening or using attachments check them for viruses and defects. Regardless of any loss, damage or consequence, whether caused by the negligence of the sender or not, resulting directly or indirectly from the use of any attached files our liability is limited to