



Submission No 39

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: University of New South Wales

Contact Person: Dr Jean Gelman Taylor
Senior Lecturer, History

Address: KENSINGTON NSW 2052



25/10/2002

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Dept. of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Committee,

I urge the Committee to give its strongest support to building up the study of Indonesian language, cultures and history in Australia. Indonesia is Australia's most important neighbour. It is also our most unpredictable neighbour and one consistently presented to Australians as hostile, dangerous and inimical to Australian interests.

The image conveyed by the media has produced a downturn in the number of students studying Indonesian language at both school and university levels. Australia has a large concentration of Indonesia specialists in our universities, but our programs are threatened because of the few student enrollments. Without strong government support, there will be no future generation of Australians qualified to speak Indonesian or to help improve relations between our two countries.


We should not be turning away from knowledge of Indonesia, but building up our knowledge, and that will only come with strong government leadership and financial support. There needs to be a call for Australians to want to understand Indonesians, and there needs to be financial support to universities so that scholarships can be offered to attract students to Indonesian Studies.

Just today I attended the graduation of one of my honours students who combined History and Indonesian language. She received a first class honours degree after completing a thesis on East Timorese history. She has just accepted a position with the Department of Defence. Last year another of my students, again with a first class honours degree specialising in Indonesian history, was hired by the Department of Immigration. Universities need to be able to attract superior students who will make a contribution to our national life. We can only do this when the government sends a clear message that our region, Southeast Asia, is crucial to Australians, and provides financial incentives to produce a constant pool of cadres with Indonesian specialties.

Furthermore, Australia must be able to continue to attract Indonesians from Indonesian universities to do their undergraduate and postgraduate studies here, and again more funding is necessary. I currently am supervising the doctoral research of three staff members from Indonesian universities. I receive 5-6 inquiries every year from Indonesians wishing to do doctoral studies in such fields as Indonesia's Islamic history who are unable to do so because of the few fellowships provided to bring Indonesians to study in Australia. This week I received an email from a potential candidate asking me if I would still agree to be his supervisor even though Indonesians had killed Australians in Bali. Our national interest lies in having Indonesian university teachers who have a positive view of Australia through the personal experience of living here and of the intellectual freedom for study.

I urge you to develop Indonesian Studies in this country.

Yours sincerely,



Jean Gelman Taylor
Senior lecturer, History, UNSW

Specialist in Indonesian history

Subjects offered at UNSW: Introduction to Contemporary Asia; Politics and Society in Indonesia; The Chinese in Southeast Asia; Tradition, Colonialism and Revolution; Islamic Worlds: From Muhammad to the Present

Forthcoming publication: Indonesia: Peoples and Histories, Yale University Press, publication date March 2003