

Submission by the
Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance



to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee

**Building Australia's relationship
with Indonesia**

Terms of reference:

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade shall inquire into and report on Australia's relationship with the Republic of Indonesia, focussing in particular on building a relationship that is positive and mutually beneficial.

The Committee shall review the political, strategic, economic (including trade and investment), social and cultural aspects of the bilateral relationship, considering both the current nature of our relationship and opportunities for it to develop.

October 2002

Executive Summary

Our relationship with Indonesia is central to Australia. As our closest neighbour, it is imperative that we support Indonesia in its transition to democracy.

There are three major areas that Australia should be supporting Indonesia:

- the development of a free media;
- the development of public service broadcasting; and
- the development of civil society.

A number of recommendations are made to address the deficit of support in these three areas.

Introduction

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance ('the Alliance') is the professional and industrial association for those working in the media, entertainment and arts industries in Australia. It has 36,000 members Australia-wide, with approximately 10,000 of these members working journalists.

The Alliance is a member of the International Federation of Journalists ('the IFJ'), the global federation of journalists' organisations. It represents over 500,000 journalists in over 105 countries around the world.

As the Alliance is the professional organisation of journalists, this submission focusses on Australia's interaction with Indonesia's media and journalists. As the Alliance is also a trade union, the submission also discusses Australia's role in supporting civil society in Indonesia.

Christopher Warren, author of this submission, is the Federal Secretary of the Alliance and President of the IFJ.

Australia's relations with Indonesia

Australia no doubt recognises the strong relationship we must forge with our closest neighbour Indonesia. This very inquiry is testimony to that fact. Indonesia is politically, strategically, economically, culturally and geographically most important to Australia.

It's transition to democracy is central not only for its own sake but for the model it sets for Southeast Asia.

However, since the fall of Soeharto in 1999 when Indonesia began moving towards democracy, it is the Alliance's contention that the Australian Government has not enough to support that transition.

This submission considers three aspects of our relationship with Indonesia: the development of a free media, the development of public service broadcasting; and the development of civil society in Indonesia

1. Development of free media

The major challenge facing all the friends and supporters of Indonesia is to encourage its transition to a stable and strong democracy. A basic tenet of any democratic society is the existence of a free and independent media.

A free media, demands several condition:

- First, the rights of a free media should be legally constituted and sanctions should not be onerous.
- Second, the media should not be restricted in their access.
- Third, journalists need to be paid a decent wage and work under reasonable working conditions.
- Fourth, journalists should be able to practice their work in safety.

Media Freedom

Indonesian journalists and the Indonesian media have long suffered under the Indonesian Government. Despite the constitutional guarantee of freedom on the press, press licensing, intimidation and outright violence was used by the so-called New Order Government to restrict the development of a free media.

There can be no doubt that these restrictions contributed to the sort of nepotism, collusion and corruption [NKK] that characterised the Soeharto era and that subsequently contributed to its undoing.

Despite the extraordinary political and economic turmoil following Soeharto's fall, the media began to prosper in a new environment of relative press freedom. Greater legal protections were instituted, and the once feared Ministry of Information was abolished.

These new found press freedoms were greatly enhanced by the passage of a liberal print media law in October 1999. The new law eliminated licensing requirements, removed the Government's ability to ban publications, and guaranteed freedom of the press.

The press law, however, is just a first step toward full legal reform. Nineteen statutes in the existing Indonesian Criminal Code can still be used against journalists, and there are no constitutional guarantees for a free press. Sanctions for leaking state secrets, for example, or printing statements that "insult" the government, can be used against reporters and may result in lengthy jail sentences. Police have the power to interrogate journalists and to launch prosecutions for these alleged crimes.

However, this new mood of liberalism is now under threat, with President Megawati Sukarnoputri re-establishing the Ministry of Information. There is also mounting pressure from Parliamentarians to tighten up the liberal press laws.

Many Indonesian journalists fear that the openness that has characterised the media since 1998 will be undermined, just as the openings of 1966-67 and 1991-2 were subsequently closed.

The Australian Government and Parliament have a responsibility to support this process of democratisation in the media.

Recommendation:

Australia should pursue, at every available opportunity, an open dialogue with the Indonesian Government on the importance on legally constituting media freedom and eliminating criminal statutes used against journalists.

Free and unfettered access

Essential to media freedom is open access by journalists to report the news.

On 26 January 2001, the Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs began to restrict access by foreign journalists into conflict areas in Indonesia. The journalists had no knowledge of the off-limit regions until they applied for visas. Visas issued stated that journalists “must not visit Aceh, Maluku or Irian Jaya”. Similarly, local journalists have had restrictions placed on them when reporting in these areas.

It is essential that the actions of the major protagonists in conflict in Indonesia – including separatists, guerillas, the Government and the military - are able to be reported.

Recommendation:

Australia should pursue, at every available opportunity, an open dialogue with the Indonesian Government on the importance on allowing journalists – both foreign and local – free and unfettered access to report throughout Indonesia.

Conditions for working journalists

The Alliance firmly believes that journalists must receive a decent living wage in order to practice ethical journalism.

The working conditions of journalists in Indonesia are among the lowest of their South East Asian counterparts. A recent study conducted by the Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI, the Indonesian organization of journalists, and supported by Australia’s Asialink) showing that journalists’ wages in Indonesia are on average lower than those in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines.

Within Indonesia, regional journalists face much lower wages and working conditions than their colleagues in Jakarta. In addition, due to the proliferation of media organisations post-Soeharto, many are financially unstable, and often do not pay wages and benefits on time, and sometimes not at all. It is imperative that wages and working conditions for journalists in Indonesia improve in order for the standard or journalism to increase.

As a corollary to these low wages, corruption in the media, through *Amplop* - the practice of ‘the envelope tradition’ where journalists receive envelopes containing cash from a news source in return for favorable reporting - is rife in Indonesia. It is thought that a substantial majority of Indonesian journalists have accepted envelopes, to supplement substandard wages. This practice is a major impediment to building the

integrity of journalism in that country, and is clearly related to the urgent need to raise the working and living standards of journalists.

Australia should be supporting the independent organisation of journalists in Indonesia, AJI, in improving the wages and working conditions of journalists and campaigning against corruption and unethical practices.

Indeed, in campaigning against *Amplop* journalism, AJI receives support from foreign governments. In its overall campaigning, AJI receives support from government funding bodies from all over the world, including the USA, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, but not from the government of its closest neighbour, Australia.

Recommendation:

The Australian Government, through AusAid and via the IFJ, should offer direct financial and in kind support to the development of independent organisations of journalists in their work on promoting ethical journalism, combating corruption and enhancing the working and social conditions for Indonesian journalists.

Journalists' safety and human rights

As well as requiring legally instituted media freedom, free and unfettered access for journalists and strong media unions able to campaign for ethical journalism and a decent living wage for journalists, a truly independent and free media requires that journalists must not fear for their lives or safety.

In a country which continues to see violent conflict, there is an urgent need to introduce basic standards of safety for reporters in Indonesia. The price of democratisation in Indonesia has been the rise of instability and violence. This has led to increased threats against journalists and other media workers from military, guerrilla groups and outright criminal gangs. Journalists are regularly intimidated, attacked and sometimes murdered in Indonesia. The Alliance and the IFJ regularly protest to the Indonesian Government about these issues.

Recommendation:

The Australian Government should pursue, at every available opportunity, an open dialogue with the Indonesian Government on the importance of protecting journalists and doing all that it can to ensure journalists can report freely and safely.

The IFJ implemented a major safety program for journalists in Timor during the lead up to the independence referendum in 1999.

This was done in cooperation between the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance and the Aliansi Jurnalis Independen. It involved opening a Safety Office for Media in East Timor [SOMET] staffed by an Australian journalist and an Indonesian journalist.

This office kept a register of journalists in the territory – foreign, East Timorese and Indonesian – advised on trouble spots and liaised with the UN mission on behalf of journalists safety. It also helped Indonesian journalists [who faced the greatest threat from the anti-independence militias] escape from the island.

Partly as a result of their work, no journalists lost their lives in Timor until after the office was closed when the UN mission withdrew. Two were killed in the time between the withdrawal of the UN and securing of the territory by INTERFET.

Although the program received practical on the ground assistance from the Australian Embassy in Indonesia and the Dili Consulate, no support was received from the Australian Government. The project was instead funded through the IFJ's Safety Fund, largely through money raised by donations from Australian journalists.

In addition, through the Indonesian organisation of journalists, AJI, the IFJ is conducting a major safety project for journalists in South Ambon and in Aceh. Again, this project is funded by European funders, while Australia, who has the most pressing interest, does nothing.

Indeed the Maluku media project has provided a model of community reconciliation and has worked to reduce conflict not just against journalists but within the region at large.

This work needs to be extended and consolidated over a sustained period throughout conflict regions in Indonesia. The stability and unity of Indonesian democracy can only be sustained by ending conflict.

Recommendation:

The Australian Government, through the IFJ, should support safety training for journalists in Indonesia. This should be in the form of direct financial support, or in kind support through Australia's military advisers.

2. Development of public sector broadcasting

In Indonesia, there are two state-owned broadcast networks: in radio there is RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia) and in TV there is TVRI (Televisi Republik Indonesia). Both have a long history and have been traditionally regarded as the government's tools for 'nation building' with a pro-government slant on news.

Both have operated under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information, famous for the 'telephone culture' whereby government officials call editors and producers encourage certain news stories in the name of good citizenship.

However, in recent times, there have been moves to reorient the networks towards editorial independence, with TVRI more advanced in this process than RRI. There is a draft broadcasting law before parliament which proposes a public service broadcasting model for the organisations, including debates using the models in Korea and Australia as a basis. Accordingly, it is an opportune time for Australia to show its support to Indonesia through supporting Indonesia's move to a public service broadcasting culture.

If ever there was a time when we need to defend and strengthen our commitment to the core values of public service broadcasting it is today. Media people and citizens alike are confronted by a growing number of problems including anxiety about the

quality of journalism and the role of media in society; and political manipulation of the media, often exploiting the fears and uncertainties of citizens and creating dangerously new levels of intolerance. This is especially the case in Indonesia.

One clear problem Indonesia faces is that of low standards. Too little is spent on jobs, staff training and on research and investigative journalism. As a result, standards are in freefall, ethical journalism is under great pressure and public confidence in news media is declining.

The discussion about public broadcasting has at its core the social realities of democratic pluralism and how we create lasting and permanent structures for democracy and stability.

The challenge for journalists, program makers and the other people who work in the industry is to define and take action in support of public service values in journalism including:

- the public's right to reliable, accurate and quality information services
- ethical journalism and editorial independence
- media with a responsibility to the public interest
- building tolerance and understanding of difference

Australia has a rich history of public service broadcasting which we should use to work with our neighbour at this time.

Recommendation

The Australian Government, through increased funding to the ABC and specifically Radio Australia, should support Indonesia's state-owned broadcasters in their moves toward full public service broadcasting. This support should be in the form of information exchange, training, secondments, conferences and resources.

3. The development of civil society in Indonesia

Stable democracy is sustained by a strong civil society: those institutions and organisations that form a supportive infrastructure in a democracy.

A civil society includes strengthening and building institutions like the Red Cross/Red Crescent, a local child rights group, trade unions, professional associations, independent educational institutions and many others. Renowned US sociologist Robert Putnam has shown that those societies that have a strong civil society component are more healthy democracies than those that do not.

Civil society does not just happen. It grows and develops because it is supported and nurtured by the work of committed activists.

Since the end of the Cold War, the aid agencies of most European and North American countries have sought to re-orient themselves so that a significant portion of their funding is directed to nurturing civil society. Private sector organisations such as Open Society have also directed themselves to this end.

Unfortunately, there has only been a limited re-orientation of the Australian funding program.

Indeed, there has been recent – albeit limited – criticism in the Australian media that Australia should not support civil society in Indonesia because it undermines a democratic government. No conclusion could be more wrong or more fail to understand the complex web of institutions that are essential to underpin a democratic society.

Indeed, failure to support democratic institutions can create a vacuum that recent history shows the international terror network will rush to fill. Democracy will be fatally weakened if, rather than a democratic civil society, we see an anti-democratic infrastructure created by the enemies of an open society.

Recommendation

The Australian Government should review and increase its aid program to ensure that appropriate support is being given to the strengthening of democratic infrastructure including civil society in Indonesia.

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