



## Foreword

On 30 August 1999 the East Timorese people took part in an historic popular consultation to determine whether to accept the proposed constitutional framework providing for a special autonomy within the unitary Republic of Indonesia or to reject the proposed special autonomy, leading to East Timor's separation from Indonesia. The consultation, conducted on the basis of a direct, secret and universal ballot, produced a result that was overwhelmingly in favour of separation from Indonesia.

However, as the world is well aware, the campaigning phase of the consultative process was marred by violence as pro-integration militia harassed people suspected of being pro-independence. Although Indonesia had undertaken to maintain security within East Timor, throughout the consultative process it appeared unable to effect this commitment. This was increasingly evident following the announcement of the result of the popular consultation. Within days of the announcement the territory of East Timor descended into a state of anarchy precipitated by the actions of rampaging militias. Within this environment the East Timorese people suffered terribly; many were killed and a huge number were displaced from their homes amidst a campaign of violence, looting and arson by pro-integration militias.

Agreement by Indonesia on 12 September 1999 to accept international assistance in resolving the security situation in East Timor paved the way for a United Nations Security Council resolution on 15 September authorising the establishment of a multinational force (under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations) charged with resolving the security situation in East Timor. It is now evident that in the few short months since International Force East Timor (INTERFET) commenced operations in late September 1999 the situation in East Timor has improved dramatically. Indeed the proposed transition to the United Nations Transitional Authority East Timor (UNTAET) somewhat earlier than expected is ample evidence of the success of INTERFET.

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) has monitored events in East Timor with a keen interest. In August 1999 three members of the Committee joined an international group in East Timor to observe the voting stage of the consultative process. It was with considerable apprehension that the Committee watched the wave of violence envelop East Timor following the announcement of the result in favour of separation from Indonesia.

Whilst the Committee had been regularly briefed on the situation in East Timor, the visit by the JSCFADT to East Timor on 2 December 1999 provided an unparalleled opportunity for members of the Committee to gain a first-hand appreciation of the situation facing the East Timorese, INTERFET, the United Nations and Non Government Organisations. Although brief, the visit included calls on a broad range of INTERFET elements as well as discussions on humanitarian issues with United Nations and Non Government Organisations. While principally focussed on Dili, the Committee, courtesy of INTERFET, was provided with the opportunity to visit Suai in the Western Regencies of East Timor.

Needless to say, the visit was absorbing for all participants. Unfortunately, the busy schedule did not allow the Committee to explore all issues presented in depth. Accordingly this report is not an exhaustive examination of the current situation in East Timor. Rather it provides an outline of the visit by the Committee and some key observations on both military and humanitarian issues in East Timor. Although acknowledging the international composition of INTERFET, the United Nations and Non Government Organisations, the report focuses predominantly on Australian involvement.

The report also includes a short perspective on circumstances in East Timor both during the voting stage of the consultative process and during the Committee's visit on 2 December 1999. The perspective has been prepared by Senator Vicki Bourne and Senator Marise Payne, two of the three members of the Committee who participated as international observers during the voting stage of the consultative process in August 1999.

The Committee is most appreciative of the efforts of the many people who contributed to the success of the visit. In particular, the Committee would like to extend its thanks to the Commander INTERFET and those members of his force who were involved in briefing, hosting and transporting members of the Committee. Worthy of special note is Major Andrew Leith who escorted the Committee and effectively facilitated a successful visit. The Committee would also like to thank Colonel Duncan Lewis who, as the Australian Defence Force Escort Officer, accompanied the party throughout the visit.

The Committee is grateful to the Minister of Defence for making available the Falcon aircraft from No 34 Squadron that transported members from Canberra to Darwin, Dili and return. To the flight crew, the Committee extends its appreciation for their unfailing cooperation and assistance in ensuring the travel arrangements proceeded smoothly.

**Senator A B Ferguson**  
**Chairman**