



## **Submission No 35**

### **Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia**

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# MACKSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

29 October 2008

To: The Committee Secretary JSCFADT

## SUBMISSION RE: "Australia's Relations with Indonesia"

I do agree that we need to build a relationship that is positive and beneficial with INDONESIA.

One stepping stone is to educate many more Australians with Bahasa Indonesia. Since 1998 I have taken school groups of seniors to improve language skills in INDONESIAN. Faces of Indonesian people transform when foreigners address them in their home language. It shows we are interested and not aloof arrogant strangers.

Since October 2001 I have led 3 groups of language students to Indonesia – 39 seniors from our school, 11 from South Grafton. Many of these students intend to continue Bahasa Indonesia at Uni for a career involving Australia/Indonesia – they hope. One girl already is in the Air Force. Several are waiting. These students are the key to our future. Already they correspond in Bahasa with ordinary citizens on a friendship level and have a positive attitude after 5 years studying the language and culture here.

Often I see on TV, officials making blunders re body language towards Indonesian dignitaries e.g. arms crossed like the US IMF gentlemen. Indonesians have their cultural ways and we need to respect these. Many times in the streets of Indonesia I have been embarrassed by the behaviour of beer swilling Australian louts – their ignorance damages the relationship incredibly. Education is needed! Indonesians look down on these "poor in spirit" foreigners.

One of my ex students became the main interpreter for the border refugee crossing of Timorese back from West to East Timor. He was one of three people in the army to be also trained in Tetum by Xanana Gusmo in Melbourne first. (Luke already had Bahasa Indonesia from my lessons). On leave back here he told me some of the stories – he was the only translator for 1,000 men although many when they were there picked up the greetings and everyday conversations.

With my current Yr12 class (Bahasa INDONESIAN language) 60% have elected to continue studies of B.I at University. This means 8 more Australians equipped to work in business, law, education and languages of Asia. We are broadening the base of our community slowly, improving the relationship and making closer ties with INDONESIA.

During the last 10 years I have thought of many ideas to increase tolerance of people in our community towards INDONESIA. Our Nambucca Valley is NOT multicultural and many people have NOT seen an Asian. You are imagining the community where the big Chinese boat with

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refugees arrived one night in Scotts Head. No one in the police knew where they came from. I spoke to them in Indonesian; no understanding; Japanese no understanding. I'm not familiar with

Chinese and the police were most upset as I couldn't communicate with them (they thought I should be able to). These people were terrified and in shock. The police had to go to Kempsey to get the Chinese chef to see if he could understand.

The mere fact that through Student Language Study in Overseas Country Grants I have taken students to Indonesia which has created more understanding and tolerance as students speak Bahasa, have positive connections with other school students and village communities (NOT staying in resorts in Nusa Dua) and maintain friendship ties. Their parents, over time change their mind set and we develop educated tolerant Australians. It takes about three days for kids to recover from culture shock.

There is another step that has been positive with young people at our school. In Yr 10 our Careers Advisor arranges "Work Experience". Two years ago I had 28 students studying Bahasa Language in that Yr 10. Many of them wished to work with **INDONESIAN** Language. This was a mammoth task for me. Through networking I arranged positions for approximately 15 of them, from Indonesian Travel agent to warehousing Indonesian importer, school in Sydney, the Embassy in Canberra etc. This kind of contact was great for these students - many worked with background speakers and got to know them as friends.

Our students are the key to the future development of relationship with Indonesia. In this community we have the ideas we first need money as we are a disadvantaged school with a high percentage of low income earners.

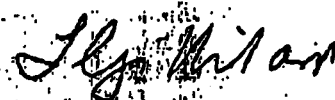
Teaching our students Bahasa Indonesia is vital. More so now than before the Bali Bombing. Members will be aware of the problems during this tragedy. Fortunately many Balinese have some limited English skills from primary education (those students who can afford to go). How much easier would this last two weeks have been for Australian parents going to Bali; if they could speak Bahasa Indonesia? They would have learned a lot more. I read reports of burn victims feeling worse because no one was speaking Balinese to them. **WE NEED TO TEACH MORE STUDENTS BAHASA INDONESIA!**

It is imperative that we draw nearer to **INDONESIA** and its people. This can only be achieved by improved communication. This cannot happen without definite language skills.

Asian Languages should be a priority in Australia. Our future depends on it! There will never be a time when our government should cut down on **NALSAS FUNDING**. We **NEED** people educated in Asian Languages for our future prosperity and peace.

Thank you

Yours sincerely



Lee Gilliland  
**INDONESIAN TEACHER**