



## **Submission No 63**

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

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**Submission to the Parliamentary Enquiry into  
Australia's relations with Indonesia 2002**



Dear Committee Members,

I write in a personal capacity, but as the former Executive Director of the International Women's Development Agency, the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, and as an Adjunct Professor at Deakin University and NGO Consultant and Board member.

I would like to make just a short submission as I am sure that many of the points I will make will be more amply covered by other submissions, but as I have believed for many years that Australia's relationship with Indonesia is one of the most important relationships Australia has, I felt it important to make a few points. I will simply express them as principles to guide the relationship.

**1. Think long-term not short-term -- be clear about the goal**

It is clearly in Australia's national interest to have a neighbour in Indonesia which is democratic, stable, economically robust, and respectful of human rights. Such a nation would be an outstandingly valuable neighbour for Australia. At present the forces for democracy and human rights in Indonesia are fragile, and the economy is in a serious state. Our policies and support should be sensitively designed to help build a more democratic neighbour with greater respect for human rights. This implies social, economic and cultural rights, not simply civil and political rights. Our cooperation should be designed to help strengthen the many forces in Indonesia working towards that goal, especially moderate Moslem forces, human rights organisations, institutions working to overcome poverty and exclusion (both government and NGO) etc. We should not give any support to those forces which have consistently demonstrated that they have no respect for democracy or human rights. This is a basic and simple principle to apply.

At present there seems a desire on the part of the Government to want to engage in military cooperation with Kopassus. This is short-term thinking. Kopassus does not represent a force which is contributing to a more stable, democratic Indonesia. Quite the reverse.

Kopassus has been linked to some of the worst atrocities in Indonesia – I am sure you are aware of them. They were linked to militia activity in East Timor, and more recently have been linked to support for Laskar Jihad and militia development in Maluku, Aceh and Papua. They were associated with the abduction and killing of Papuan leader Theyis

Eluay (a man committed to non-violent change in Papua), and appear linked to the killing in August of two Americans and an Indonesian employed on the Freeport mine. Support for Kopassus is not a move that will be in Australia's long-term interests at all. It will simply help entrench the power base of a *rogue force* which refuses to be subservient to civilian control and which has no interest in Indonesia's democratic transition.

If there is to be any cooperation against terrorism let it be with the police force, who while far from perfect, at least has more respect for the civilian government.

It is important that we do not make short-term decisions which jeopardise our long term interests in seeing that democratic transition more fully entrenched.

## **2. Strengthen equitable economic development**

Economic strains can exacerbate pre-existing tensions and conflicts causing violence. We have seen this in a number of other cases, and even, following the 1997 crisis, in Indonesia itself. Indonesia's economy is still experiencing the after effects of the 1997 financial crisis. A weak economy weakens the democratic transition. Greater support is needed for an equitable economic recovery. Well-considered economic cooperation, including debt reduction, is the strongest long-term measure to avoid terrorist-friendly fundamentalist groups getting a greater hold in Indonesia. Some consideration of debt reduction, in a managed way, could help the current government to address underlying socio-political problems which may easily provide a breeding ground for wider support of fundamentalism. Australia's support for this could be very valuable internationally, and could assist Indonesia to restore the kind of economic and social development it needs to stabilise. Our development cooperation should focus quite directly on poverty reduction and the promotion of human rights. Whilst some assistance may be given for macro-policy, the bulk of our assistance should be targeted clearly on direct poverty reduction and promotion of human rights (especially including socio-economic rights). It is vital that the development which occurs is equitable, and does not exacerbate inequality, causing greater tensions.

## **3. Promote non-violent resolution of conflict**

There remain some serious, violent, conflicts in parts of Indonesia, many of which stem from historical injustices of the colonial period. They will not be solved easily, or by violence. Australia should not indicate its support of a policy that condones the most gross human rights violations in the name of 'territorial integrity'. States have both rights and responsibilities to their citizens – best summed up in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Australia should be quite clear in its condemnation of violations by both State and non-state actors, but it should be very clear that none of these conflicts can be solved by brute force of organs of the State (or their proxies). They must be solved by patient (and no doubt difficult) negotiation and with respect for human rights principles, including the principle of self determination. The lesson of East Timor should be very clear to Indonesia. Brute force will be resisted with ever greater determination by subject people. The best friendship that Australia can offer to Indonesia is to make this clear –

not to accommodate to approaches which go against all the principles of human rights and conflict resolution we hold dear in this country. Furthermore, Australians have failed to understand that Indonesia will have no respect for us if we subjugate our principles in an attempt to 'have a good relationship'. A *good* relationship will be based on *mutual respect*, including respect for differences of view from time to time. We can be respected for having consistent principles – not for overlooking them when they become a bit uncomfortable at times.

#### **4. Show respect for Indonesians**

A relationship of respect is essential. The way our Prime Minister and media handled the East Timor situation, in relation to Indonesia, was a disaster. Rather than a 'gloating', 'we made them back down' approach, we should have immediately praised Indonesia for making the decision to withdraw its sovereignty and respect the wishes of the Timorese people. After all the destruction, they made that decision, a very embarrassing and difficult one. It should have been treated respectfully and they should have been given credit for it. On the whole, (with a few notable exceptions) our political leaders and our media have a very superior and patronising attitude towards Indonesia and this is entirely unhelpful. Indonesia is a vast nation, with many levels of complexity. We mostly fail completely to grasp the nuances and complexities, and make terrible blunders as a result. The Bali response was probably one of the better ones by our leaders and the media, although there still seems to be an element of surprise that the Indonesians could do a successful investigation – a hangover of our patronising attitude.

#### **5. Build broad relationships and promote education and language.**

The key to good relationships is to build greater interaction and depth of contact between Indonesians and Australians, so that there is mutual understanding of our rather different societies. This means at all levels and across all sectors of the societies. It does not just mean at elite levels with those in power. It means at community-community level, across the professions, community organisations, faiths, different governmental relationships (at bureaucratic level), as well as business relationships. Relationships which are not just about Australians earning income (eg by having fee-paying Indonesian students) are vitally important if we are to be seen by ordinary Indonesians as having their interests, not just our own, at heart. Some of this is already happening and is of immense value. More is needed.

The current criticisms of NGO relationships with Indonesia by the IPA are totally scurrilous and unhelpful. The Australian Government should be telling the IPA this, not pandering to their lies and innuendo by restricting Australian NGOs. Parliamentary Secretary Chris Gallus MP has made a useful defence of AusAID and NGO programs, and this is what is needed to demonstrate to Indonesians that we can defend what we do, and we will not be swayed by irresponsible and poorly researched attacks by a fringe group like the IPA. It would be interesting to know where their linkages in Indonesia are, and whose interests they might be serving.

On a broader level, there is a need to more actively promote Asian studies and languages, especially Bahasa Indonesian. I understand that BI is taught widely in Northern Territory schools – it would be valuable if it could be taught much more widely across Australia. We need to be able to communicate with a full grasp of the nuances of each others' languages.

#### **6. Give support for an International Tribunal for East Timor**

My final point is rather more specific. One of the best ways to strengthen the hand of those in Indonesia working for democracy and human rights would be to give support to an International Ad Hoc Tribunal for East Timor. The current trials in Jakarta are clearly not going to end the impunity of senior Indonesian military and police figures responsible for the human rights violations carried out in East Timor before and during 1999, although they may continue to convict some of the Timorese underlings. Rather, many of these Indonesian officers are now continuing their practices in other parts of Indonesia. The impunity must not continue. It is in direct conflict with efforts by many Indonesians to promote human rights and non-violent solutions to conflicts. Whilst this would be a difficult thing for Australia to do, it is the best thing for the long-term well being of Indonesia and Indonesians. We should have the courage to proceed, sensitively, with others, along this path – while helping Indonesia amply in other areas (such as the socio-economic cooperation already mentioned).

I wish you well in your deliberations and would be happy to expand on any aspects of this brief, personal submission, should you wish.

Yours sincerely

**Janet Hunt**

1 December 2002