

Submission for the

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF AID EFFECTIVENESS Panel.

This submission is intended to put the case for Australian government overseas aid to be available to non-government aid organisations who are now working in Timor Leste.

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Personal background

The author, is a member of a 'Friends' group that supports the people in the district of Manatuto in Timor Leste.

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Government aid programs are primarily directed to the governments of other countries who are selected on the basis of perceived need.

In the past this has led to serious inefficiencies in the use of the money provided, mainly due to corrupt or inexperienced officials of those governments.

My case is based upon two models that have been used very successfully in the past. Namely the Peace Corp program developed by the US and the Australian non-government Friendship group volunteers working in Timor Leste.

What we have learned about Timor Leste

We have learned over the 8 years of working with Timor Leste that there are many serious and complex problems that still need to be solved. Also that many Australian are aware of and sympathetic to Timor Leste. We had many East Timorese refugees living here in Melbourne during the Indonesian occupation. I believe that some Australians were not happy with the way East Timor was treated during the occupation ( e.g. by co-operating with the Indonesian government over the oil and gas fields) and not opposing the occupation. But today these are not issues and the Australian army is welcome there.

Australians helping Timor Leste

I am certain that members of the panel are aware of the program initially promoted by the Local Government Association in Victoria and supported by many city councils in both Victoria and NSW. There are now more that 30 Friends groups in Victoria alone who raise funds, visit East Timor, and manage projects in many

districts of Timor Leste. My own group was created with the help of the City of Kingston in Victoria in 2002. The mayor at that time was elected as Chairman of the committee and several members of council continue to support our projects.

During the last 8 years that we have been working with the East Timorese, several of our members have been able to visit Manatuto and discuss their local problems. We realise that in the past there have been mistakes made in assuming that we knew best at what was needed. In about 2000 the Japanese sent a military engineering group to Manatuto to build a canal system to divert winter 'wet season' water to the paddy fields. Unfortunately when they left nobody knew how to operate the control system and it was not of much benefit. We were not about to make this mistake.

The essential fact about our groups are that we help people in Timor Leste directly and independently of the central government. This was also the model followed by the US Peace Corp. Early in our own history we were able to contact an American Peace Corp member in Timor who was able to find the right contacts with whom we wanted to discuss aid projects. A big problem in Timor is the language, Tetum, which is unique to Timor Leste. Few people in Timor understand or speak English. From the beginning we were severely limited by the language problem but even then we managed to meet with the local Administrator, later to bring him on a visit to our city to learn about local government operations particularly for infants and children. Also in the early years we funded and organised the supply of water to two villages within the district. Most importantly we raised enough money to design and build a kindergarten. Last year the kindergarten opened and 47 children were enrolled. A part of this project was the training and employment two local teachers for the kindergarten and the provision of their salaries for the first two years. Training was done by the local Catholic sisters who have a lot of experience in education.

Last year we were introduced to an Australian woman who has been living in Baucau in Timor Leste, speaks the local language, and is presently helping the local people, funded by another Friends group. Because she has a laptop computer and can travel to Dili we are able to organise communication with local officials in Manatuto, and to help us plan for new projects. She now represents our group with the local Education Manager who has now committed to take over the management and support of the new kindergarten. Because the kindergarten includes a separate room to be used as a library, we are planning to use this room as a local meeting house for teaching local people or for technical training.

#### Raising funds for Manatuto.

As a non-government group we have to raise money from local Australians in order to fund all our projects in Manatuto. To do this we have organised Trivial Pursuit nights, Children's concerts, dance band performances, Choir performances and other entertainments. To make these earn us enough money we rely on the good will of local performers who do not charge for their time. We have now applied to the Tax Office to allow us to declare that donations can be tax-deductible.

Why Friendship groups and other non-government charities should receive Australian Aid money.

Much remains to be done in Timor Leste. The local government has made mistakes because of their understandable lack of experience in government

In my opinion three of the most important issues are:

- 1.Support for local farmers
- 2.Education
- 3.Electric power

Because of our experience and understanding of local needs and our ability to work with Timorese people we can help with projects that are needed and will be beneficial to the country.

We can design projects that can be costed and approved by the local people, and during and after completion we can report on progress and report on problems. No projects would proceed without the understanding and approval of the central government. I understand these conditions apply to the existing Australian AVI volunteers who work in Timor Leste.

Suggested basis for grants to be made to Friends groups.

Because Friends groups are using money that is provided by local Australians, we are very conscious of the need to ensure that funds are used effectively. Since the panel's objective is to improve the efficiency with which funds are granted, grant amounts could be calculated as a ratio of the costs for planned projects. Projects can be classified in terms of most urgent e.g. Education Scholarships could be supported as a percentage of the total cost with the remainder by the Friendship group. This ensures that Friendship groups will select carefully those projects that they know will meet the most important and immediate needs and Ausaid would be able to indicate the most preferred types of project.

Our group members already pay for their own transport and accommodation for personal visits, and also for the costs of our consultant in Timor Leste. Grant money would only be applied directly to approved projects.

Other contacts

There are many Australians who are much better informed than myself that you may wish to contact for more information. Hopefully some of them have also sent submissions. If not you may be aware of Rae and Damien Kingsbury ( University of Geelong ), Stephen Bracks ( ex Premier of Victoria ), Kristie Gusmao ( first Lady of TL. Wife of Prime Minister )

Should the panel plan any meetings in Victoria I will be glad to have the opportunity to provide further information.

Jim Franks