

## Australia Day Breakfast

The breakfast held at Regatta Point in Commonwealth Park was attended by almost a hundred members and guests. His Excellency Hernani da Silva , Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in Australia gave an excellent talk which appears below:

Excellencies , Chairman and members of Order of Australia Association, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

First off all, allow me to on behalf of the people of Timor-Leste congratulate you on this historic day- The day of Australia. In our life, there shall be moments for us to remember and reflect and the Australian Day is definitely that part of Australians intimate life as the citizens of this great country.

I feel honored to be invited to join you in this special occasion, and be within all of you, recipients of the Australian Order, recognized citizens of meritorious service to Australia is indeed the reflection of Australian people kindness and feeling of friendship for Timor-Leste people.

I was requested to take this opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between Timor-Leste and Australia, the past, present and future. I shall acknowledge that I feel not really comfortable to talk about the past, as I believe that many of you that are here today, have an in-depth knowledge for the past, on what happen between our two people and countries, you lived it with your own experience and exposure. Nevertheless, I would try to share with you what we have been told by the history and I hope it does not contradict the reality.

Timor-Leste, or East Timor as what it is known in many countries, is a relatively new state. It regains its independence in May 2002 after two decades of devastating war against the military regime of Soeharto and more than 4 centuries of colonial occupation.

Timor-Leste is well known to the majority of Australians, through the long history of the WW II and most recently the Australian leading role in the INTERFET.

To put the contest of my intervention in prospective I would like to take the liberty in drawing a time frame to facilitate our focus on the issues I was asked to reflect upon.

Giving the reality of the two countries, we might take the principals events that marked the history of Timor-Leste as temporal demarcation in defining this time frame.

The past of Timor-Leste could be in this way divided into the past distance, marked by the period between 1901 and 1974 and past recent from 1975 - 1998.

The present of Timor-Leste might encompass the period between 1999 - 2007 and hence the Future of Timor-Leste from 2008 onward.

When we are talking about relationship between two countries, we are inevitably touching upon the principles of what are known under the international relation theories. It might take a magnitude of elements that some times are complex and require an elaborated analysis to understand. I would rather concentrate on a much more simplistic approach, by looking at factual issues that evolved within and around Timor-Leste and Australia to try to explain the nature of the relationship between our two countries.

As alluded in the introduction the past relationship between Australia and Timor-Leste might be divide into two relatively distinct period, the period between the establishment of the Federation of Australia and the World War II (the past distant) and the period thereafter until 1998 (marked by the financial crisis in Asia and the fall of Soeharto Regime)- past recent.

During the past distant period the global political sphere was one of the existence of colonial powers in Asia region, specially the presence of Dutch in what is known as Indonesia today and Portugal in the eastern half Island of Timor. The struggle for influence and power that ultimately influenced the strategic alliance arrangement between European countries by that time, to some extent influenced the view of Australia on the level of importance of Timor-Leste to Australia. Main concern by that time was that a weak Portuguese, the old British ally, could result in the overtaking of Timor by other hostile powers, hence posing a threat to the British and Australia interest in the region, specially if linked to its position in the shipping routes between Australia, the Philippines and Cina .

During this period, potentially, Timor-Leste was a minor issue for Australia as Australia was going trough difficult times in its national politic and economic endeavor, remarkably the great depression of 1930's .

When the WWII break out and Japanese initiated its campaign in the South East Asia, apparently Australia was putting another emphasis on Timor-Leste by sending to the Territory its envoy in the end of 1941. Unfortunately few weeks after the arrival of the envoy Australia and Dutch were forced to deploy their military personnel in Timor-Leste, despite the neutrality status of Portugal in the WWII. Soon after, in February 1942 Japanese forces invaded Timor-Leste and the War of Timor, between allied forces and Japanese commenced. Timor-Leste was involuntarily dragged into the war and ten of thousands( estimated at about 40,000 - 60,000) of Timorese residents lost their lives and other ten of thousands have to endure the hardship of the war in different ways.

The strategic position of Timor-Leste in a potential full scale Japanese campaign scenario against Papua New Guinea and Australia was probably the reason of this "forward defense battle" mounted by Australia.

The presence of Australian diggers in Timor-Leste was soon attracted many Timorese. The Australian diggers were known for their tenacity, simplicity and courage. Many Timorese, for various reasons, joined the diggers in the guerilla war against the Japanese. This marked the first intense encounter between the Timorese people and Australian people that proved to last until the recent days. Many of the former diggers and their families maintained their link with their Timorese friends, and many of these individuals contributed immensely to the building of Australian public opinion in support of Timor-Leste struggle for liberation during the period of 1975 - 1999.

Soon after the WWII until 1971, Australian established its Consular mission in Timor-Leste that turned out to be of considerable importance and convenience to the residents in Timor-Leste (the only regular air and postal services to Timor-Leste was provided by Australian aircraft from Darwin).

In the period between 60,s and 70,s there was a slightly interest shifting from Australia towards Timor-Leste as part of the Portuguese empire. The mounting pressure around the world on the issue of decolonization, the emergence of newly independent countries and organizations such as the Asia Africa Conference, which majority of its members were also members of the Commonwealth, might have contributed to the overall view of the needs to a posture adjustment in the light of global and regional policies.

In 1974/75 the political situation in Timor-Leste was volatile and uncertain resulted from the collapse of Portuguese political policy towards its overseas provinces. The situation soon attracted the interest of several generals within the Indonesian Government. Timor-Leste was seen by many powers of the region and the world as a fragile territory susceptible to ideological influences and was politically unviable and economically unsustainable to be independent. The heat of the cool war and the political volatility that marked many South East Asia countries in the 70,s further compounded the destiny of Timor-Leste. In the mean time, in Australia, it was the period of significant political adjustments. Under PM Whitlam. Australian foreign policy, specially in regard to South East Asia was gaining another momentum. Any policy in regard to Timor-Leste that had the potential to embarrass Indonesia needed to be carefully weighed.

Australian position on Timor-Leste issue in the period between 70,s and 90,s is therefore heavily influenced by the global and regional political dynamics versus Australian national interest.

After two decades of resistance, specially after the Santa Cruz massacre in 1991, the world views on Timor-Leste resistance gained a new dimension. Touched by the images of the massacre the world became aware of the reality faced by Timorese people. Across the world solidarity groups become more vocal, hence provided a much favorable environment for Timor-Leste foreign diplomacy. The award of Nobel Prize to two Timorese leaders in 1996, the collapse of Soviet Union and the end of

cold war, the democrats on the US Government, the Asia Financial crisis, the reformation movement in Indonesia and the fall of Soeharto regime, all provided an enabling environment for political posture adjustment by Australia in regard to Timor-Leste issue.

A national consultation was seen as the best and appropriate way to end the long standing Timor-Leste issue, and Australia played an important role in convincing the new Indonesian President, Prof. Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie to accept the call for a referendum in Timor-Leste. The referendum provided the international venue and legitimacy to end the occupation of Timor-Leste, even though with a high price paid by Timorese people. The horror perpetrated by militia groups moved millions of Australians to request an immediate intervention by Australia Government to reestablish peace in the country.

Australia played a crucial role in the deployment of INTERFET in 1999 and continue thereafter with its development and humanitarian assistance to Timor-Leste until now. Timor-Leste was then recognized as an independent state, a poor and underdeveloped country which needs support. Australian support to Timor-Leste comes under different mechanisms, such as the Australian Federal Government, the States Government, Civil Society Organizations, educational institutions and individuals. Hundred of millions of dollars have been provided under these schemes during the last 5 years. The virtue of Australian people feeling toward Timorese people could be now seen in the very diverse initiatives sponsored by Australian people. We have now established the link between cities in Australia and cities in Timor-Leste through what is now known as the sister city programme, we have schools in Australian that are partnering with schools in Timor-Leste such as the Friendship School Programme, we have vocational and higher institution actively providing training and learning opportunity for Timorese, we have the Australian doctors and surgeons providing needed health assistance to Timorese, even a private hospital, fully supported by Australian doctors is planed to be open soon in Timor-Leste to assist the Ministry of Health with specialized services required by the country.

The liberation of Timor-Leste definitely provided the venue for a free and direct interaction between Timorese and Australian people to revive the long history of engagement that was interrupted by the occupation.

#### The Future

The principle of Timor-Leste as a sovereign state, a country that valued the ideal of democracy and justice and committed to advance peace in the region and the world shall form the platform of future relationship between Australia and Timor-Leste. These and other shared values need to be explored and nurtured.

The good relationship between the people of Timor-Leste and Australia, will provide the common ground of a better understanding between the people of the two countries and it will shape the future relationship between the two countries.

Timorese people is expecting Australia to be one of its main partner in the region, a partnership that will promote peace, security, wellbeing and mutual support between the people and the government of the two countries.

Being an independent state Timor-Leste is aware of the need to address a multitude of issues that dominate the affairs between the two countries. These issues shall however be addressed on the basis of mutual understanding and friendship by respecting international principles and values that both of us are abided to.

In years to come Timor-Leste shall expect a close cooperation with Australia in promoting democracy, development, combating illegal traffic, people smuggling, terrorism and others. Australia could also play a very crucial role in the development of Timor-Leste human resources and the promotion of tourism, trade and investment for a reciprocal benefit for the people of our two countries.

The existing framework through which the interaction between the Timor-Leste and Australia occurs shall prevail and further enhanced, these frameworks could provide alternative ways to suit different levels and nature of engagement that marked this new era of a global world where we are living.

By working together in a principle of mutual respect and support the future will be brighter and colorful for our people and our countries.