



Editorial – End Impunity, Restore Justice

On 20 January Timor Leste's report by the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) was presented to the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan by Timor Leste President Xanana Gusmao. The Report was so damning in its findings and recommendations that after it was presented to the Timor Leste Parliament on 28 November last year it was withheld from the public. Leaked to the media two days before its handover to the UN, the report, titled "Chega!" (Portuguese for "Enough!") contains a litany of crimes against humanity: mass executions, forced resettlements, horrific torture, including sexual torture, and abuse of children.

The Commission, sponsored by international donors including Australia, was formed in 2002 and was intended to be a healing process. It took 8,000 statements from people about the 1999 referendum violence, the 1975-1999 Indonesian occupation and the brief civil war in 1975. The 2500-page Report puts most of the blame for the deaths of as many as 183,000 civilians with the Indonesian Government and its security forces. More than 90 per cent of these

deaths were caused by a conscious decision "to use starvation of East Timorese civilians as a weapon of war."

While the Report assigns most responsibility to Indonesia, the U.S., Britain and Australia are also criticised, and especially the UN Security Council for failing to stop the crimes against humanity over 24 years. The Report says Australia "contributed significantly to denying the people of Timor-Leste their right to self-determination before and during the Indonesian occupation". Australia, in order to maintain a good relationship with Indonesia and to get the most it could out of maritime boundary negotiations affecting oil and gas reserves, gave Indonesia economic and military assistance throughout the occupation and advocated on its behalf in the international community, the Commission said.

The Report recommends that Indonesia make reparations to Timor Leste, and makes many similar recommendations to those of the UN Commission of Experts (COE) last year, including that the Security Council establish an international tribunal if other processes fail to provide substantive justice (which they haven't!). The Security Council has yet to respond. It also recommends that States make military sales and co-operation "totally conditional on progress towards full democratization, the subordination of the military to the rule of law and civilian government, and strict adherence with international human rights, including respect for the right of self-determination."

Furthermore the Report recommends that "States that had military co-operation programmes with the Indonesian Government...apologise to the people of Timor Leste for failing to adequately uphold internationally agreed fundamental rights and freedoms in Timor Leste during the Indonesian occupation." Particular to Australia, it recommends that the Australian Government return to Timor Leste documents and other materials that relate to the militia activity in 1999. These documents were removed to Australia after the arrival of the Interfet forces. Also that the governments of Australia, Britain and New Zealand jointly investigate the

truth behind the slaying of the 6 journalists in 1975.

To date the Australian Government has virtually ignored this Report. The AETFA calls on the government to implement the recommendations, especially in light of what is happening in West Papua, Maluku and potentially again in Aceh. This may be Australia's chance to redeem its appalling foreign affairs policies in the Region.

Bob Hanney

Secretary, AETFA-SA

...for more on the CAVR REPORT...

In an SBS interview *Justice John Dowd* says it is up to countries such as Australia, rather than Timor Leste, to push for justice and restitution (page 3), and in *The Age Dr Scott Burchill* discusses Australia's role in extending the misery suffered by Timorese, and Papuans (page 4).

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TIMOR SEA DISPUTE

The *Sydney Morning Herald* editorialises on agreement to share revenue from the Greater Sunrise oilfield, but reports it will take at least 10 years to see result (page 2).

And the *Timor Sea Justice Campaign* sees a new phase with many issues remaining unresolved (page 3).

50 ASYLUM SEEKERS...

While 43 West Papuans seek asylum, there are also 7 West Timorese muslims seeking asylum (page 4).

WEST PAPUAN CAUSE

Clinton Fernandes looks at the relation between human rights and self-determination, while journalists protest their exclusion from West Papua (page 5).

Helping Timor Leste...

Miriam Tonkin reports on succes of baby cloths appeal (page 5) and visit of Sister Susan Connelly (page 6).

Abortion and Prostitution Debated in Timor Leste

The *Alola Foundation* and other women's organisations have sought input on new laws (page 6).

AETFA NEWS

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East Timor's rich future

January 16, 2006

Sydney Morning Herald, Editorial

The welcome resolution of East Timor's dispute with Australia over oil and gas revenue from the Timor Sea means about \$150,000 for every man, woman and child in the recently independent nation.

The expected \$15 billion to \$20 billion in royalties and taxes is a dizzying windfall for a young country where more than half the population scrapes by on a couple of dollars a day. As the President, Xanana Gusmao, has often argued, the money is nothing less than East Timor's future. For the first time since the end of Indonesia's brutal occupation in 1999, the East Timorese people have a real prospect of building a stable, independent, prosperous nation. The oil and gas deal signed last week ends years of bitter wrangling which saw Australia frequently cast as the rich bully standing over its tiny, vulnerable new neighbour. With both nations due to reap substantial profits, bilateral relations should resume their rightful warmth. Australia played a leading role in East Timor's reconstruction, and the revenue dispute had jeopardised that considerable

goodwill. More than a happy ending, however, the agreement is a beginning.

Resource riches are not in themselves a guarantee of prosperity. In the 1950s economists naively assumed the winners in the global resource lottery would inevitably become wealthy as they sold off their natural riches. Yet many apparently rich nations fell victim to the now familiar "resource curse". Take, for example, the tiny Pacific nation of Nauru. The single generation which tasted the big money of phosphate royalties forgot how to work, squandered the cash and the phosphates ran out. Nigeria has earned \$350 billion in oil revenue over four decades, but its people are worse off. Closer to home is Papua New Guinea - resources-rich, but corrupt, violent and getting poorer. Then there are the unedifying struggles for control of the loot; civil conflict is about 50 times more likely in resources-rich nations than those with nothing to dig up and sell.

Resource income seems like free money; no one has to toil away in the fields or factories, it just gets credited to the Government's account. One of East

Timor's most pressing social problems is unemployment and idleness, especially among young men - and its potential for social strife. Turning oil and gas income into productive jobs is extremely difficult, especially with an acute skill shortage after decades of war. Understandably, expectations of a better material life will soar, yet huge public spending risks distorting the local economy and leaving too little money in the bank for the future, when the oil and gas have run out. This is not to suggest East Timor's leaders are unaware of, or unprepared for, the challenge. A recent World Bank report noted East Timor has performed better than other post-conflict countries. A sound oil and gas investment fund, based on a successful Norwegian model, was made law last year.

However, the World Bank also warned official corruption is on the rise and the new administration remains shaky. If East Timor slips back into the same patterns of endemic corruption and poor governance which characterised Indonesian rule, the resource curse will have found another victim.

Timor gas project on hold despite deal

January 12, 2006

SMH/AAP

The Greater Sunrise gas project remains on hold despite the signing of the Timor Sea gas agreement between Australia and East Timor.

The deal will see the two countries put aside the dispute over their maritime boundary for 50 years.

At the end of 2004 Woodside said it was putting Greater Sunrise on hold due to the lack of certainty.

After the deal was announced, East Timor Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri said he was hopeful that gas could start flowing from Greater Sunrise within about 10 years.

Mr Downer said a maritime commission would also be set up to consider issues affecting the two countries. These include managing security threats to offshore platforms and co-operating in fisheries resources.

Woodside said there were still a few steps to go before the joint venture partners in Greater Sunrise would be making any decisions.

"The first step for us is to understand what's in the agreement," Woodside

spokesman Roger Martin said.

"And the next step is for the agreement to be ratified by the Australian and Timor Leste parliaments, so there are a few more steps along the way."

Mr Martin said there was almost no one working on Greater Sunrise at the moment and it was too early to say whether people would be reassigned to the project now a deal had been struck.

The project is touted as a \$US5 billion (\$A6.63 billion) development with the Timor Sea field estimated to contain about eight trillion cubic feet of gas and about 300 million barrels of condensate.

The field is 450 kilometres from Darwin and about 80 kilometres from East Timor.

The East Timorese have been keen for LNG from Greater Sunrise to be processed in their country, but Woodside restated its preference for a pipeline to a processing plant in Darwin.

Intersuisse energy analyst Peter Arden said Darwin was seen as a less risky

option by the developers because of the security of its power supply and political stability.

He said the deal should encourage the joint venture partners to get the project moving again, but they would want to see the agreement finalised.

"There is no doubt the majors just don't want to get embroiled in things where there is uncertainty or where there is any suggestion that the deal is going to have to be renegotiated and rejigged," he said.

Woodside is the operator of the Greater Sunrise project and has a 33.44 per cent stake. US oil and gas giant Conoco Phillips has a 30% stake, Anglo-Dutch multinational Shell 26.56% and Japanese energy company Osaka Gas 10 per cent.

The joint venture partners have already spent about \$250 million on the project.

A New Phase for Timor Sea Justice Campaign

Timor Sea Justice Campaign, Melbourne.
www.timorseajustice.org
 February 2006.

The governments of East Timor and Australia recently signed a new resource sharing agreement that covers the Greater Sunrise gas field.

This event marked a very major development in our campaign to change the Australian Government's policy of unilateral depletion of contested petroleum resources in the Timor Sea.

Although, the deal does not adequately reflect East Timor's legal entitlements under current International Law and it also disappointingly postpones the pivotal debate of where permanent maritime boundaries should be established for future generations, the agreement is a significant improvement on the miserly deals previously put forward by the

Australian Government.

There were many factors that contributed to this dramatic shift in the Australian Government's position, but there's little doubt that the Timor Sea Justice Campaign's work of raising public awareness of the issue and highlighting our Government's morally bankrupt behaviour, helped mount the pressure needed to produce a fairer result for East Timor.

The Timor Sea Justice Campaign would like to thank everyone who took an interest in the issue and supported our efforts in a wide range of ways.

The treaty now needs to be ratified by the national parliaments of both countries. The Timor Sea Justice Campaign will continue to monitor and report on such developments on our website.

We will also continue to monitor the situation regarding the 'downstream processing' of the gas and oil as the Timor Sea Justice Campaign strongly believes that East Timor should receive its fair share of the 'flow on' economic benefits associated with the development of its own natural resources.

Despite these on going efforts, the role of the campaign has entered a notably less active phase, so our supporters can expect to hear from us less frequently.

But please stay informed by keeping an eye on our website which will soon be experiencing some redevelopments as we continue with our long term campaign calling for the establishment of permanent maritime boundaries with East Timor in accordance with current International Law.

Indonesian military should face war crimes tribunal

January 19, 2006

SBS World News Australia

(Interview with Justice John Dowd of the International Commission of Jurists.)

MARY KOSTAKIDIS: The East Timorese Government appears reluctant to pursue Indonesia's role in the deaths of up to 180,000 people. Does that surprise you?

JUSTICE JOHN DOWD: Not at all. Their future is tied up with their two big neighbours, Australia and Indonesia, and when you've got a big neighbour with a gun, who has already invaded your house recently, you tend to be polite to them, so I think it's perfectly understandable, looking to the future, that the East Timorese Government take that view.

MARY KOSTAKIDIS: How should the international community respond, including Australia? Should Indonesia be called to task, and how should this be done?

JUSTICE DOWD: This should be done by the UN establishing a war crimes tribunal to determine the truth of this. It means East Timor is not involved. It can't possibly do it itself, in any event, but we want the facts enunciated, because this report won't get into every home. The United Nations should pay for it but particularly the countries like the US and the UK that supplied them with arms and equipment and aircraft, and Australia, who

helped to train Indonesian soldiers. I have spoken to some of those soldiers who were trained by Australians when I was there for the consultation.

MARY KOSTAKIDIS: What about these West Papuan asylum-seekers? The sign that they were holding up said "save us from genocide". Is Indonesia repeating its policies in East Timor in West Papua.

JUSTICE DOWD: It's not to the same extent but they have repressed, very savagely, and we've seen it on television, student riots and student demonstrations, and yet they're quite peaceful riots. People have been jailed and sent away for 10, 15 years for just demonstrating and holding up a flag. So there is evidence - strong evidence - that people are being persecuted for their religious, for their racial views, for their views about independence.

MARY KOSTAKIDIS: And what about our response to these asylum-seekers? The Minister says the men will be held in detention, the women and children will be out in the community. Isn't that the appropriate course of action under Australian law?

JUSTICE DOWD: Well, that's why many of us have been making a fuss today about it. We want to make sure they're not in Baxter or, you know, the other side of the moon. We want to ensure they're in

metropolitan areas. Why should they be in detention? There should be a bail-type provision so that people can be released. If people are prepared to go surety for them, like any murderer is entitled to get under State law, then these people should be allowed out. Yes, the women and children should be in the community but the men, if they can establish identity and are shown to be healthy and so on, they should be released as well. Australia is an island.

MARY KOSTAKIDIS: Amanda Vanstone says Australia's relations with Indonesia won't affect the outcome for these people. Do you believe that?

JUSTICE DOWD: Oh yes, I am sure that's right. These people shouldn't go back. They have clearly demonstrated...well, I should imagine in most cases will demonstrate there is a genuine fear of action against them. They have entered Australia, they should remain here and be processed here. It reminds us how close Indonesia is, in terms of West Papua, and these people should be allowed to remain and not be put in concentration-type camps. They should be allowed to remain in our community while they are processed.

MARY KOSTAKIDIS: Mr Dowd, thank you for your time.

East Timor - our part in their misery

Scott Burchill

The Age,

23 January, 2006

The UN's inquiry into Indonesia's brutal 24 year occupation of East Timor, leaked to the Australian media last Thursday, will come as no surprise to activists who opposed the policies of successive Australian Governments, beginning in 1975. Nor to the people of East Timor.

However, the report which documents torture, rape, slavery and starvation leading to the unnatural demise of as many as 180,000 civilians (from a pre-invasion population of 628,000) should shame those ministers, journalists, diplomats and academics who downplayed or ignored consistent human rights abuses in the former Portuguese colony - incredibly described as "aberrant acts" by former foreign minister Gareth Evans.

This group, known as the Jakarta lobby, not only sought to protect the reputation of the Suharto dictatorship at every opportunity. They went out of their way to oppose East Timor's claim for independence (a "lost cause" - Richard Woolcott) and accused critics of the regime in Jakarta of not only exaggerating the scale of the repression, but of being "racist" and "anti-Indonesian" (Woolcott). Their influence on official policy has been considerable. Rather than indict those responsible for crimes which would have made Slobodan Milosovic and Saddam Hussein blush, governments from Whitlam to Howard ignored regular reports of atrocities which the Catholic Church believes constituted the greatest slaughter relative to a population since the Holocaust. Why?

When "stability", oil and gas reserves and "good relations" with Jakarta were (mistakenly) thought to be at stake, the state terrorism of the Indonesian military was uncomfortable for Canberra but acceptable, providing most of it could be concealed from the Australian public. When that proved impossible, as in the case of the 1991 Dili massacre, damage control designed to protect the bilateral relationship rather than humanitarian concern, was the order of the day. The Howard Government's current approach to Islamist terror could scarcely be a greater contrast in behaviour.

The double standard continues today. While NATO spends millions trying to track down Radovan Karadic and Ratko Mladic, Suharto remains comfortably retired in the suburbs of Jakarta, with neither Canberra nor Washington showing any interest in bringing him to account for his considerably more serious crimes.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian legal system is cracking down on small-time drug traffickers but shows no stomach for prosecuting senior military officers responsible for the heinous acts detailed in the UN report. Despite promises to refer these officers to an international tribunal if Indonesia failed to bring them to justice, Alexander Downer now seems equally reluctant to see those he misleadingly described as "rogue elements" in court.

The hefty price of maintaining stability in the archipelago has been paid in Timorese blood and anguish, and yet it still proves elusive. This is because rebellions and secession are partly a reaction to what is being "stabilised" behind Indonesia's political boundaries.

The recent arrival of 43 West Papuan asylum seekers reminds us that turning a blind eye to repression in the name of stability is not only a dereliction of our ethical duty, it is politically shortsighted and usually results in blowback. Unfortunately for these latest arrivals, the government which will decide if they qualify as refugees could not be less sympathetic to their claim for independence. John Howard and Alexander Downer are more committed to West Papua's retention within the Republic of Indonesia than most of the residents of its Eastern-most province appear to be.

And yet after reading the UN report into East Timor, who can dismiss their accusations of political persecution and genocide? Is history repeating itself?

It may be expecting too much for each member of the Jakarta lobby who played such a prominent and nefarious role in East Timor's nightmare to reflect on the UN's findings and examine their conscience. However, governments such as Australia's, which contributed to the immiseration of the East Timorese by recognising Jakarta's illegal invasion and brutal occupation, still owe these people a great deal, the least of which are reparations and the truth about their modern history as detailed in this devastating report.

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Dr Scott Burchill

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West Timor refugees 'forced' to attack Christians

The Age

January 30, 2006

A GROUP of West Timorese is seeking asylum in Australia from Indonesia claiming they have been pressured into carrying out attacks against Christians in their village.

Mustafa Ridwan, 23, a Muslim from Alor in West Timor, said he and his brothers Supardi, 39, and Mahmud, 30, and a nephew, 18, fled Indonesia because they did not want to be enlisted in anti-Christian campaigns.

"Our situation was not safe so we came to Australia," he said from Christmas Island, where the group has been held for almost three months.

He said the group bought a boat in Sulawesi and went back to West Timor, where members picked up the wife and two children of one brother, and then sailed for Australia.

They bring to 50 the number of people who have fled Indonesia to Australia in the past three months, after 43 West Papuans arrived last week. All are

detained on Christmas Island.

Mr Ridwan said the seven arrived in Western Australia on November 3.

West Timor, under Indonesian rule since 1949, has one of the poorest populations in Indonesia, Jason MacLeod, a spokesman for the Australian West Papua Association said.

The Refugee Review Tribunal last week heard an appeal against the family's rejection.

SANDRA JACKSON

West Papua – Self Determination and Human Rights

17 February, 2006

Clinton Fernandes

Senior Lecturer, Strategic Studies

Australian Defence Force Academy

A major challenge for more committed activists will be the framing contest over proposed solutions to the West Papua problem. Sympathetic politicians and members of the public will be open to human rights concerns. But support for a comprehensive UN solution, incorporating self-determination is another thing entirely.

If the lessons of East Timor's campaign are any indication, West Papua solidarity groups will now begin to experience more public interest in their activities, as well as an increase in their memberships. Self-determination/independence is unlikely to be the main concern of most people who are new to the movement. The newcomers are likely to be primarily interested in human rights issues, usually staying well clear of the West Papuan demand for independence. The latter may be considered too 'political'.

Nevertheless, despite the subjective focus on human rights to the exclusion of 'political' issues like self-determination, the OBJECTIVE consequence of human rights demands may be to increase the cost of the occupation. After all, if continued Indonesian rule is possible only by violating human rights, then any barrier to these violations is also an impediment to continued Indonesian rule. Furthermore, the focus on human rights will have the effect of complicating Australian

diplomatic efforts; it will be increasingly difficult for them to claim that West Papua is successfully integrated into Indonesia.

Media ban in West Papua is an attempt to conceal human rights abuses

17 February 2006

International Federation of Journalists

(IFJ) – (www.ifj.org)

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has written to the Indonesian Government demanding the removal of the ban on foreign media in West Papua.

The IFJ is concerned over the stance taken by Indonesian Minister of Defence, Juwono Sudarsono, claiming the ban on all foreign media, churches and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is required for fear their presence in West Papua would "encourage Papuans to campaign on issues of human rights".

The ban has prevented any foreign journalist from having official access to the region in the past eighteen months, severely restricting the media's ability to tell the West Papua story. There is also the concern that the foreign media ban is a direct attempt to conceal human rights abuses from the world.

The restrictions on foreign media are in direct opposition to Indonesia's obligations since ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 19 recognises the right to "seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."

"Restrictions on foreign journalists represent a blatant violation of this right and seriously curtail the ability of the world's media to report in West Papua," said IFJ president Christopher Warren.

"An independent and free media is essential to ensure democracy. The silencing and censoring of the media will only fuel misinformation and foster conditions for abuse, mistreatment and corruption. The denial of foreign media access to West Papua suggests an attempt to conceal human rights abuses," said Warren.

The IFJ is calling on the Indonesian Government to lift the ban as was done in Aceh after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. A free and independent media in Aceh allows the media to fulfil its job as the people's watchdog against corruption, human rights abuses, mistreatment and political and corporate mismanagement.

Greater public scrutiny of the region is needed to minimise social, cultural, political, human rights and environmental abuses by the military, local government or corporations.

The president of IFJ's affiliate in Indonesia, Alliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI), Heru Hendratmoko, said: "AJI will never agree with any policy on media banning . . . We have to respect the people's rights wherever they live, including people in West Papua, to get access for information. So let journalists work freely there."

Success of Baby Clothes Appeal

To assist the Alola Foundation of East Timor, AETFA approached Child Care Centres for baby clothes. In response large quantities of clothing, school materials and sanitary goods for mothers were collected.

Dispatched last November, these arrived in Dili in December. Vanessa Lowe, of *Carry for Kids*, arranged to have the consignment transported free of charge.

Sheila Boston, the Coordinator of the Alola Maternity Pack project in East Timor was in Adelaide recently and met with committee members of AETFA. She reported the appeals great success. Alola now has enough baby clothes to last another six months. There is still a need

for other items for the packs, such as good quality towels and soap, and lengths of material to be made into wraps for the babies and clothing for the mothers.

Rotary is collecting goods to fill a container leaving in mid-March. If anyone can provide any of the goods listed above, please contact Miriam Tonkin on 8295 6481 or Maureen O'Flaherty of Rotary on 8165 0966 (ah) or (m) 0438 830561.

Money greatest need

Sheila Boston told us that Alola plans to employ 30 women to sew baby wraps and clothing for the mothers, providing much needed employment. However, mothers'

and babies' appeal had proved so successful it had left some of Alola's other programmes without sufficient funds. The Friendship Schools Project had also been a great success, with many schools in the eastern states queuing to be paired with schools in East Timor, but it needed a paid coordinator to administer it.

School sponsorship was another area badly in need of money. \$4 a month will provide a scholarship to ensure a child gets an education. Offers of sponsorship can be made to the Alola Foundation, PO Box 3, Dili, East Timor via Darwin. (or go to: www.alolafoundation.org)

Miriam Tonkin

Chairperson, AETFA-SA

Visit of Sister Susan Connelly

We were delighted to welcome Sister Susan Connelly from *Mary McKillop East Timor* (formerly the Mary McKillop Institute of East Timor Studies, Sydney) to Adelaide recently.

The Institute's main focus has been on providing literacy materials (they produce

children's books in Tetun for schools in East Timor) and supporting East Timorese students, both in Australia and their home country. They are also very active in the campaign to persuade the Australian government to give a fairer share of oil and gas revenue to East Timor. Sister

Connelly, believes that the latest 50/50 sharing agreement on the Sunrise field is still unjust and that Australia should settle the maritime boundary between the two countries according to international law.

Miriam Tonkin

Chairperson, AETFA-SA

The Abortion and Prostitution Debates

December 2005

Source: *Friends of Alola Newsletter*

The Alola Foundation has been busy leading the advocacy amongst civil society groups in relation to the abortion and prostitution debate. In May of this year, the Government of Timor-Leste and the Catholic Church issued a joint declaration proposing that abortion and prostitution be criminalised under the Penal Code, a final draft of which is presently being debated by the Council of Ministers. The proposal was part of the resolution of a three-week long demonstration held in Dili against the government's decision to make religious education in schools not compulsory. The Alola Foundation, along with the East Timorese Women's Network or Rede Feto (an umbrella organisation for some 18 Timorese women's organisations) made known a deep concern at the lack of consultation with women's civil society organisations in a letter to the Prime Minister. As a result, the Prime Minister acknowledged the need to canvas public opinion and promote debate on the two issues and tasked the Office for the Promotion of Equality to engage with the Alola Foundation and Rede Feto for this purpose. Alola then arranged to facilitate three information and discussion forums for civil society through June and July. The objective of these forums was to share information and explore the complex legal, social and moral aspects of abortion and prostitution in the Timorese context. Abortion and prostitution are still taboo issues in Timor-Leste and there is generally a dire lack of information and knowledge on either subject. The primary objective of the forums was therefore to provide a space for Timorese women to develop informed opinions on these subjects. The forums were both interesting and difficult, with many views being shared and discussed from different perspectives. The key recommendations to arise from the discussions were: 1) there

should be exceptions to the criminalisation of abortion if a woman has suffered rape, incest or where there is a risk to her health; and 2) prostitution should not be criminalised, but further models for regulation should be explored by the government. There was also recognition of the need for data on the prevalence and effects of unsafe abortion in Timor-Leste and further research on the socio-economic aspects of prostitution. These recommendations were put forward to Dona Micato, the head of the government's Office for Promotion of Equality, for discussion with the permanent Working Group, which was established by the Government and the Church to consider matters under the joint declaration. As a result of Dona Micato's presentation of the views from the forums, the Working Group has recommended that the provisions criminalising abortion be taken out of the draft Penal Code and be dealt with under a separate law. This is a small but significant victory and we hope that it will present a further opportunity for civil society to engage with the church and the government on this issue.

If you have any thoughts, information or materials to contribute to this important debate in Timor-Leste, please contact; NWRC Coordinator; Veronica Correia veronica@alolafoundation.org or Kirsty Sword Gusmão kirsty@alolafoundation.org

Interview with Sister Michelle Reid
ABC Radio National, Religion Report
18 January, 2006

Among the many Australians who have been working alongside the East Timorese since (1999) is Sister Michelle Reid, a Benedictine nun who's been in East Timor since the year 2000. She started out there as an English teacher, then in 2001 she began working at the Becora Prison in Dili.

Sian Prior was in East Timor in July (2005), and she caught up with Sister Michelle Reid in Dili...

Sian Prior: Michelle, this is a very Catholic country, the Catholic church has a lot of power here; it's also a country where women have an average of about 8 children. Your population is going to be a major issue in this country. Do you feel critical of the Catholic church in East Timor?

Michelle Reid: I think the Catholic church is in a very difficult situation. There's very few priests and so it's very difficult for the clergy to be able to pastor huge parishes, and it is a big issue, population. Fifty-percent of the population are under 15. The whole thing about birth control is a big issue, AIDS, even though it's very, very small at the moment, that is still an issue, and you have all these young people emerging with no employment, they're going to get married younger and younger and the women are going to have more and more babies, and the death rate for women in childbirth and early infancy deaths is still of great concern. So I think the church has to be able to work realistically in that, and the same with just recently in the demonstrations that we had and the bishops had called on (Prime Minister) Alkatiri to make prostitution illegal, I think that was not a positive move for women, and for that industry, and for protecting the women who are really victims, and for controlling it. You just drive everything underground. So I think it's a very tenuous sort of situation for the church leaders, and I don't think it's going to get any easier, I think it's going to get harder, because there's a lot of other denominational groups coming in that will threaten their number game, if that's the way you look at it. I think too, the young people are going to be looking for something more than just being preached at.