

Ba Ami Nia Belun Sira

Newsletter for Friends and Benefactors



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WHY IS TIMOR HUNGRY ?

A tiny half-island of surplus humanity

by Ben Moxham

Last Monday, 7 February, the East Timorese newspaper Suara Timor Loro Sa'e reported that at least 53 people had died of starvation in the village of Hatabuiliko since October 2004. "There is absolutely nothing to eat," reported Domingos de Araujo, the sub-district secretary, and "those still alive are looking for wild potatoes in the forest." Reports from the districts continue to filter in: 10,000 people are starving in Cova Lima; 10,000 households are going hungry in Suai; and Los Palos, Baucau, and Manufahi districts are all reporting a food crisis.

The government's National Disaster Management Office has quickly counselled against overreaction because this is not "starvation and hunger like in Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and elsewhere." Instead, what is happening "is known as FOOD SHORTAGE" (their capitalisation) and this "happens every year".

And there lies the deeper tragedy: this is not extraordinary news. Regardless of whatever definition the government is playing around with, hunger is so common in East Timor that November to March is referred to as the "hungry season". Last year, food aid was distributed to 110,000 people in eleven out of the country's thirteen districts and in a 2001 survey, 80 per cent of villages reported being without adequate food at some time during the year.

While a tough drought shares some of the blame, the question that screams to be asked is why is a nation of just under one million people, which is supposed to have received more donor funds "per capita" in the last five years than anywhere else, starving?
over...

"Your friends
do not forget you."



A child in Timor-Leste rummages in a rubbish area for items he can sell. See Joan Westblade's article *over...*

Free Timor, Free Market

from front

....The economy is steadily contracting and unemployment is skyrocketing with 15,000 people entering the workforce each year. Even the IMF conceded at the last donors' meeting that these pressures are "reinforcing widespread poverty and serious underemployment". The deepening crisis of Asia's poorest country should be apparent to all. Indeed, donors have been wondering why Timorese farmers and workers aren't blossoming into productive micro-capitalists, like the textbooks tell them.

Local wages are too high, says the IMF in their latest report, praising the government for resisting "the introduction of populist measures" like a minimum wage. (The World Bank led by example, forcing Chubb security to cut the salaries of the Bank's security guards from \$134 to \$88 per month.)

They're not ambitious enough, says one donor - commissioned trade report, recommending the engagement of an institute to teach Timor's "low income youngsters entrepreneurship". They should forget about their rice and chickens, and diversify into "market dynamic commodities", counsels USAID and the World Bank.

(But)... even if a handful of farmers can produce niche commodities for fickle Western consumers, the rest of the country will continue to suffer or simply disappear like the 53 men, women and children of Hatabuiliko. Under the free market, Timor is just a tiny half island of surplus humanity.

Is it so offensive for a nation as poor as Timor to be allowed to instead adopt policies which support and protect 85 per cent of the population? To heal Timor's deep colonial scars, "the government should subsidise the rural poor by investing in basic infrastructure," says Maria "Lita" Sarmiento from the local land reform and conflict resolution organisation Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute (KSI) (meaning "streams come together"). "We don't need expensive technology; we just need to support our traditional systems," she says.

Timorese farmers need to develop their natural food sources, not to develop a dependence on food aid, and the hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizers that are dumped on them.

Focus on the Global South (www.focusweb.org) 15.02.05

The correct title of our newest close neighbour is "Timor-Leste", or in Tetun, "Timor Lorosa'e". "Leste" is pronounced with two syllables: "Lest-e" with the emphasis on the first. The "e" is short, as in "get" or "bed".

Joan Westblade LCM writes:

"The desperate poverty situation, particularly of the children, was brought home to me at Christmas time when I saw a young boy about 8 years old climbing into putrid rubbish to retrieve some tins which he could sell. Children walk 3 or four hours down the mountains from villages carrying heavy loads of fruit and vegetables on bamboo rods across their shoulders. They make this journey in the dark, setting out at 3 or 4 am to arrive in Dili at 6 in time for the markets. They look so small to be burdened with such responsibility. One little girl aged nine told me that she was trying to get money for her school fees.

There are few paying jobs for the youth and many sit around with nothing to do. Those without homes squat in anything providing shelter. These burnt out, dilapidated buildings were once free, but now people have to pay \$10 per month for the privilege of squatting, an impossible goal if you have no work.

I was deeply moved by the despondency of young families but felt powerless to do anything. Thanks to the generosity of many people I was able to fill the car with rice, tinned fish and noodles and I drove around the streets each day in an effort to provide a Christmas meal for those I knew who had nothing at all. These immediate, stop-gap measures are necessary to tide people over; the causes of this poverty must be addressed."

Tess Ward OLSH reports:

"The whole of the Suai district is affected by hunger. Suai had rain very early so the people planted corn, but without further rain it has all died. Aileu had so much rain that the crops were washed away. Caritas Timor is doing all it can. Last week (March 11) we bought 30 sacks of rice and 60 cartons of noodles to distribute to families we meet on our travels."

The Mary MacKillop Institute can arrange for food to be bought and given to some of those in need if donors would like to contribute. We do not send goods to Timor any more because of import restrictions and costs. Money donations can be easily and quickly transferred, and products can be purchased and distributed, thus contributing to the local economy.

Timor-Leste: National Development Plan 2004

The priorities of 40,000 people in 500 villages were:
Education (70%) Health (49%) Agriculture (32%)
The Mary MacKillop Literacy program is a long-term answer to the people's expressed basic desire.

Update on the Literacy Program

While the work with the Primary Schools in the Dili diocese is an ongoing process, over the past 18 months we have become more involved with the Kindergartens.

The Kindergartens in East Timor are basically the equivalent of our pre-schools in Australia. Children between the ages of 4 and 6 years attend prior to commencing primary school. Kindergartens are organised into two levels and undertake basic literacy and numeracy development.

Last year the government formalized the Kindergarten program by providing teachers with a curriculum set out in units of work based on themes. To date we have developed units on "Plants", "Animals" and "My Country" and have undertaken teacher workshops with a number of the Catholic Kindergartens to assist the teachers with programming, weekly daybooks and daily timetables.

The workshops begun last year are continuing and we are currently developing units of work on "Transport", "Communication", "My Friends" and "Christmas".

In the primary schools we cover the area of programming and timetabling as well as running workshops on basic literacy skills, including story reading, conference writing, oral and written cloze and various other aspects of oral and written Tetun.

(Irene Macinante RSJ)

Update on the CD

Many thanks to everyone who bought a "Christmas in East Timor" CD. We were able to distribute \$300 US to each of the 35 members of the choir, and as well they bought for themselves a new keyboard which will be used regularly in the Church at Balide. Each choir member was thrilled to receive the money, which was the equivalent of 3 months wages in East Timor, should one be fortunate enough to have a good job. They were very proud of themselves, and rightly so.

COFFEE CORNER

One way to help East Timor's coffee exports is to support Trade Winds Tea & Coffee Pty. Ltd. Trade Winds buys Timor's coffee and develops markets for it in Australia. Send for a price list...you will be more than happy with quality and service.

Trade Winds Tea & Coffee Pty. Ltd.
PO Box 63 Revesby North NSW 2212
Phone 02 9792 1094

www.tradewinds.org.au

See also: www.dilicoffee.com/news.asp

Update on Students

In February Tess Ward OLSH conducted a day-long meeting with the students who receive support from generous donors working through the Mary MacKillop Institute. Of the thirty-seven full time University students receiving help, thirty-two came to the day, no mean feat when the only means of communication was by letter hand-delivered a few days previously.

The aim of the day was to provide an opportunity for the Buka Matenek students to come together as a group for personal growth, to receive assistance with basic study skills and for direction in accountability.

The students outlined their study schedule so that we could gain a clearer understanding of the issues they face. They were given some advice as to how best to use their time, and how to make the most of the few resources they have.

There was an emphasis on some of the values which will stand them in good stead: hard work, kindness to others, trust in God and the equality of all people. Further work of this nature will continue in July.

(Susan Connelly RSJ)

yourfriendsdonotforgetyouyourfriendsdonotforgetyouyourfriend

A Fair Go in the Timor Sea

Timor-Leste's most lucrative resource is the oil and gas in the Timor Sea. All the areas in the Timor Sea whose ownership is disputed by Australia and Timor are on Timor-Leste's side of a half-way line between the two nations.

From the disputed area named Laminaria/Corallina Australia has received \$1m (US) per day in tax revenue since 1999. The total so far has reached nearly \$2 billion (US), ten times the amount of all assistance Australia has given to Timor. The total value of disputed areas of the Timor Sea is more than US\$30 billion of which Timor will receive one third under present arrangements despite the resources being twice as close to Timor as to Australia.

As we celebrate Anzac day this year, let us not forget the Timorese people whose courage and compassion saved the lives of many of our Australian diggers in Timor in 1941-42. Let us continue to fulfil the promise made by the Australian Government of the time when it dropped leaflets all over the island as the Australian soldiers withdrew:

"Your friends do not forget you."

See www.timorseaoffice.gov.tp

www.timorseajustice.org

Bones of Australian Soldiers in Dili

from Timor Post (Newspaper in Timor-Leste)

Major Tom Hall, an ex-military man, went to East Timor recently after spending 25 years investigating Australians who were involved in the fighting against Japanese troops. He found some bones of Australian soldiers at Suku Lahane Oriental, near the Arabian cemetery close to the old Portuguese radio station.

The three Australian soldiers' names were: Lieutenant Eric Joseph Liversidge, W.O. Jeffery Willersdorf and Corporal Hugo Pace. Major Hall's long research had pin-pointed the area and when in Timor he was helped by local people who knew that the remains were there. As there are other remains on the site, Tom Hall is thinking of building a memorial monument.

Major Hall told the newspaper about the circumstances of the three soldiers' deaths. Lieutenant Eric Joseph Liversidge died in November 1944, W.O. Jeffery Willersdorf died in February 1945, and Corporal Hugo Pace died in June 1945.

According to Tom Hall, Japanese troops tortured, beat and killed them together with the Timorese who helped the Australian troops. He said that before digging up the bones, he went to see Patrício da Luz, a Timorese man, who was the radio operator at that time.

Beside Patrício da Luz's information, Tom Hall also found more evidence from the Australian National archives in Canberra, much of which came from the testimony of Sergeant Sancho Silva, given on the 4th of October 1945.

Major Hall first began to look for the bones of the dead Australian soldiers in East Timor during the Indonesian occupation in 1981. The Indonesian government would not co-operate, but this did not stop Tom Hall. In 1992 he went through the Australian Embassy in Indonesia seeking access to Timor through the military but only succeeded in 1999 when East Timor was liberated.

With the help of Josephine Mitchell RSJ, Tess Ward OLSH, Tom's Timorese friends and some residents, the place was found. After unearthing some of the bones, the Parish Priest of Motael, António Alves, was invited to bless them followed by a traditional Timorese ceremony where the remains were re-buried.

Sincere thanks to all our benefactors and donors. Without your support we would not be able to supply our wonderful literacy program to the children of Timor-Leste.

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Staff of the Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies, their volunteers and associates wish all our readers a deeply happy Easter, one full of meaning, purpose, joy, rest and relaxation.

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SURNAME.....ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

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