

Ba Ami Nia Belun Sira

Newsletter for Friends and Benefactors



Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies

Ph: (+61 2) 9623 2847
Fx: (+61 2) 9623 1573
Ph/Fx Dili 670 3317 422

PO Box 299 St Marys NSW 1790
20 Mamre Road St Marys 2760
PO Box 427 Dili Timor-Leste

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www.mmiets.org.au

Mary MacKillop Program for the Whole Nation

Significant Developments in Children's Right to Read

At last it is official that the children of Timor-Leste will be taught to read in the main local language, Tetun.

Despite the fact that Tetun and Portuguese were declared official languages (Article 13, Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste) attempts were made to teach children in Portuguese from their first year of schooling. Educational authorities have now agreed that this approach has not been successful and have recognised the universally accepted norm that children learn best to read and write in their own language or in one familiar to them.

This is a basic principle of our literacy program *Mai Hatene Tetun*, which up until 2005 had been used in 70 schools in the Diocese of Dili. From the beginning of the school year, September 2005, it will be used in all schools, Government and Catholic, in Timor-Leste.

This major development is a result of the new Language curriculum which is based on a bi-lingual approach and which will be implemented in all schools across the country. It requires that children in Grade One be taught in Tetun and will ensure that children have the opportunity to learn to read and write in that language. Towards the end of Grade Two and then in Grade Three and the higher grades, children will be introduced to Portuguese orally and later in its written form. The Mary MacKillop Institute, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, played an active role in writing the curriculum and the accompanying teachers' guide.

A recent decision of the Cabinet of Ministers endorsed this approach and subsequently the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture has requested the use of a number of our books for use in Grade One. Large quantities of these books and other educational resources will be needed and UNICEF has the task of printing and distributing these materials. The next stage of the implementation will be for Grade Two with higher grades to follow.

We are grateful that the work of ten years is now bearing such fruit and that our books and other resources are there for all the children. It has been a great team effort but we must pay tribute to Sr Tess Ward OLSH whose expertise, experience and tireless work has brought the Tetun Literacy Program to its present stage. Our thanks, too, to all donors who have helped us to make the program a reality.

Asylum Seeker Saga Nearly Over

Many would have heard of the East Timorese people who had recently been told to leave Australia, although most had been here for between 9 and 12 years. They were among the almost 1700 asylum seekers who escaped from the Indonesian occupation in the 1990s.

The tense political situation surrounding the occupation of Timor by Indonesia and Australia's relationship between the people of both lands caused these asylum seekers to remain in uncertainty for years. Very few were granted refugee status but most were finally allowed permanent residence on the intervention of the Minister for Immigration. This occurred after long years of struggle against Government efforts to designate them as Portuguese citizens.

The supporters of these asylum seekers witnessed the great stress they suffered through the uncertainty of their situation. Many Australians worked hard alongside the Timorese, encouraging them to tell their stories of hardship. Supporters saw the anguish of these Timorese people: the anguish they felt at not being believed; the hardship of being found not to be Portuguese and then having that decision appealed against by the Government not once, but twice; the difficulty of realising that others who had suffered similarly in East Timor were allowed to stay here permanently.

...thanks to all donors who have helped to make the program a reality...

Asylum Seekers cont.

During all this time, the Timorese worked hard, paid taxes and contributed to Australian life. Some married and had children. They were unable to do University courses without paying full fees, so the chances of higher education while they waited were curtailed.

Various trips to Canberra to plead their cause were undertaken over the years, as well as demonstrations and rallies which highlighted their plight. Countless Australians took up their cause, visiting and writing to those in power to redress an unjust situation.

The final chapter came earlier this year when about 50 of these people received a letter saying that they were to make arrangements to leave the country within 28 days. It was puzzling that family members of these 50 had received permanent residency in Australia, but that this group had been singled out and told to leave.

Most distressing for these people was the Government's claim that there were "serious character grounds" for their deportation, and that they were not told the substance of these accusations. It is a serious matter if any group in Australia can be accused by authorities of "serious character issues" without specifying the accusations. It was just another added burden to these people who could not understand why they were being treated like this.

On legal advice, the people undertook to send Federal Police checks on their standing in the community to the Minister for Immigration. Nothing more, as yet, has been said about the "serious character issues" the Government claimed existed in May.

Finally these people received an instruction from the Department of Immigration that they were to have health and character checks, often the final formality before receiving permanent residency. The public statement from the Department at this time was ambiguous, declaring that six of the people would not be allowed to stay, and signalling that nothing is assured for the others.

However, relief and thanksgiving are the feelings which most people associated with this saga are experiencing. A full ten years of uncertainty and effort appear to be concluding with a positive outcome for most of the Timorese people. **Thank you for your support.**

No one in Australia is worse off by these people remaining here; indeed, Australia is enriched. No one in Australia should ever have to go through such a thing again.

Coffee Corner

Oxfam is an international NGO consisting of 12 affiliate organisations. Oxfam works directly with coffee farmers in a wide range of countries throughout the world and is currently supporting an international campaign to advocate for reform of the international coffee trade system to provide improved incomes to small coffee farmers.

*Overview of the Coffee Sector in Timor-Leste Update
Nov. 2003 to February 2004*

Don't forget... Trade Winds Tea & Coffee Pty Ltd
Ph 02 9792 1094 www.tradewinds.org.au

Teacher Placement Program

This program, sponsored by Parramatta Catholic Education Office, is directed towards the placement of teachers in Same in the Manufahi district of Timor-Leste. A request from teachers in Same for help with the teaching of English attracted a number of volunteer teachers mainly from schools in the Parramatta area to take up the challenge. So far seven teachers have spent up to three months in Same conducting training courses for Timorese teachers of English, generally making friends and enjoying their stay. The plan is to send a further eight teachers in pairs over the next 12 months.

The preparatory course for the volunteers included topics such as *Global Strategies* and *English as a Second Language*. Our task was to share insights into the culture and to introduce participants to the Tetun language. Members of our staff were delighted to work with such generous and dedicated teachers and in our sessions with them covered topics such as:

- An elementary study of the Tetun language which included exercises in pronunciation, conversation, and basic grammar;
- Sharing cultural insights about traditional attitudes, practices and creative expressions; raising awareness of difference and the need for openness, acceptance and mutual respect; dealing with practical matters such as appropriate forms of behaviour, ways of relating, appropriate clothing, sharing food and hospitality etc;
- Sharing information about the present situation in East Timor particularly with regard to the schools, methods of teaching and education in general;
- Dealing with matters of Health and Hygiene; Hints about how to keep healthy.

Congratulations to Mr Ken Nobin of the Catholic Education Office Parramatta for sponsoring the course, to Ms Jenni Kanaley for providing the inspiration and to Mr Vic O'Callaghan for his co-ordinating role.

Compassionate Care

Emergency Food relief

The people of East Timor are desperately poor. Hunger, malnutrition and disease are widespread. The Mary MacKillop Institute regularly distributes food to needy families and individuals who are either in Dili or in country areas. Many have 4-6 children with no father to support them. Mothers try to eke out an existence by selling a few vegetables. Included are a group of elderly, incapacitated people who have no close families and who would die without our support. Supplies are also taken to remote villages at regular intervals (i.e. when the team from the Mary MacKillop Institute visits the schools to conduct teacher training workshops or to deliver educational resources). The average cost of food distributed per month is AUD\$1000.00.

Tetun Literacy Program

Irene Macinante and Rosita Kiss write...

On our recent visit to East Timor it was exciting to see the progress that is being made in teacher training, curriculum development and resource procurement.

UNICEF are working with the East Timorese Curriculum Development Team and we, at the Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies, feel privileged to have been asked to be part of this stage in the history of East Timorese independence. We are involved on two levels. The first is the actual writing of the Tetun Literacy Curriculum for Grades 1 – 6, and the second is in the area of providing resources and teacher in-service. A day was spent discussing essential resources for the Tetun curriculum at which MMIETS resources were displayed. UNICEF has decided to use the Tetun literacy program already developed by our Institute. This program will now go into the 800 East Timorese schools, both Catholic and Government.

Also while we were in East Timor we were able to follow-up with several schools where we have worked in the past. We visited and ran workshops in kindergartens in Bedois, Bemori and Rainha da Paz where we feel very comfortable with the teachers because of on-going visits.

Our time spent in the mountains in Same and Bobonaro was wonderful. We spent four days in Same and worked with both the kindergarten teachers and the primary school teachers.

...children's right to read...

The primary school workshops involved teachers from four surrounding areas. It is always a humbling experience to work with teachers who are prepared to walk for four hours in extreme heat to learn more to help them in their work with their students. This says much about the dedication of the teachers of East Timor.

When working with the kindergarten teachers (also from several areas) we were interested to see what appeared to be large gold circles on many of the desks. Upon investigation however, we discovered that these were really the reflection of the sun through many, many holes in the roof of the building. The teachers told us that these holes make it impossible for them to have classes in the wet season. One more problem to be contended with in the effort to educate the children of East Timor.

One can only continue to admire these people for their determination to provide quality education under the most trying of circumstances. Certainly, we are inspired each time we visit and always look forward to the time we next meet our friends to continue our partnership in the field of education.

The photo below shows MMIETS resources displayed in a little school near the Cathedral in Dili



Joint Declaration between Timorese Church and State

You may have heard recently of a demonstration in Timor-Leste, and of difficulties between Church and State over various issues. The following article appeared in the newsletter of the Dili Diocese and is signed by the President, the Prime Minister and the two Bishops of Timor-Leste.

- Article 42 of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (RDTL) secures the people's freedom for peaceful gatherings and demonstrations.
- The Constitution of RDTL says that the objective of the Government is to defend and guarantee political democracy and the participation of the people in resolving national problems.
- The way our nation is established demands that feelings are manifested and questions are asked in a peaceable manner.
- The Constitution of RDTL guarantees freedom of conscience, religion and worship, and requires separation between religion and state.
- The Constitution of RDTL requires the Government to promote cooperation with different religious confessions.

The Government and the Bishops of Catholic Church of Timor-Leste, agree to respect the Constitution of RDTL, together declare the following:

1 We acknowledge the importance of the religious values in the construction of national identity and of the development of the nation, socially, culturally and politically;

2 We acknowledge the fundamental place of moral and religious values in an individual person's formation;

3 We acknowledge that these values should be incorporated in all schools;

4 We acknowledge that the teaching should be available to all citizens, without any discrimination whatsoever.

5 We acknowledge that teaching of religion should be included as a regular subject in the curriculum, and should consequently appear in the timetable. Its place in the curriculum is to be made clear at enrolment, so that the parents can freely choose whether their children are to receive such lessons or not.

6 Abortion shall be defined as crime, except in cases where it is absolutely necessary to avoid the death of the mother. The law will see the practice of voluntary prostitution as a crime but should protect victims forced into prostitution. As in the penal code Art. 155 and 156, the exploitation of children is a crime.

7 It is guaranteed that there will be no threat or retaliation from the authorities against the demonstrators when they return to their residences, and it is guaranteed that they will be physically safe and free from intimidation.

8 A permanent group will be created in one month from the signed date of this Joint Declaration, and will be composed of representatives of Government, the Catholic Church and other religious persuasions. Its mission will be developed what has begun here and to make recommendations for addressing existing problems and to prevent future problems.

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I wish to subscribe to "Ba Ami Nia Belun Sira" @ \$5.00 per year \$.....

I wish to contribute to the work of the Institute by making a donation. I enclose cheque/money order: \$
(Make out to *Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies*)

OR by Credit Card: Mastercard Visa Bankcard

I wish to claim tax deductibility: Yes No

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