

Regarding :

“The consequences of termination of the Treaty between Australia and The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste on Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea”:

This is a timely initiative that presents an opportunity to lay the foundations for improved relations between the Commonwealth of Australia and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

Renegotiating the maritime boundaries in a fair and equitable manner, consistent with international law, including UNCLOS, is in both countries national interest.

Despite its dubious diplomatic record up to 1999, Australia has invested significant blood and treasure to ensure the independence and stability of Timor-Leste. Its position on the maritime boundary is not consistent with that investment and runs contrary to the broader interests of both countries and has undermined Australia’s standing in the region. It has also left Australia looking like a hypocrite when making pronouncements on the South China Sea dispute, something that the Chinese Foreign Ministry has gleefully pointed out.

I first visited Timor-Leste in 2000 and lived there from 2002 to 2005 and again in 2015-16 as well as numerous visits in between. The Timorese are a resilient people but the incredible suffering of the Indonesian occupation is evident everywhere. That Australia sought to profit from that suffering, through diplomatic strong-arm tactics to gain an unfair share of oil and gas reserves, is an indelible stain on the nation.

Since 1999 the Timorese have been struggling to rebuild their country. Revenue from their share of the proceeds of oil and gas sales are all they have, but these are expected to be exhausted in as few as 8 years. Resolving the dispute on the maritime boundary is a prerequisite to developing untapped fields to ensure Timor-Leste has a revenue stream to ensure its continued development.

Whilst living in Dili last year it was evident to me that most Timorese citizens see the 2006 CMATS Treaty as a travesty of justice and a gross infringement on their national sovereignty. Large portions of civil society are actively involved in activities to highlight this injustice, including very large demonstrations outside the Australian Embassy.

Australia now has an opportunity to right a terrible wrong and replace CMATS with a just and equitable maritime boundary agreement consistent with international law. One that fully recognizes Timor-Leste's sovereignty, and facilitates the ongoing development of the country for the betterment of its citizens.

Dr Ingvar Anda
Downer
ACT 2602
Australia