



**Submission No 57**

**Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia**

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The Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Parliament House  
CAMBERRA ACT 2600

By email: jscfadt@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

**Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Inquiry into Australia's relations with Indonesia**

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry, which we regard as timely and extremely important.

**INTRODUCTION**

The first part of this submission provides some background to our interest in Indonesia and a word picture of our impressions of the country and its people.

The second part of the submission contains examples of the way in which Indonesian people are ill-informed about Australia and the actions of the Australian government.

The third part of this submission summarises our reasons for believing that good relations with Indonesia, and the engendering of a positive attitude to Australia among ordinary Indonesians, is critically important for Australia's security.

The fourth part of this submission contains some practical suggestions as to actions Australia could take to help develop a positive attitude to Australia among ordinary Indonesians.

**BACKGROUND**

We are an Australian couple in our fifties, of Anglo-Saxon heritage and Christian upbringing. Our interest in Australian-Indonesian relations stems from the fact that we hosted a Muslim Indonesian exchange student (our Indonesian "daughter") for a year in 2000.

Graham is a compliance manager with an energy company and Lyn is heavily involved in the local Catholic church activities.

We recently visited Indonesia to visit our Indonesian daughter, meet her family and learn more about Indonesia.

We spent four days in Bali on our own then met our Indonesian family in Yogyakarta and spent two and a half weeks travelling with them in Java and Sumatra (where they live).

In Bali, we were looked after by two guides arranged by the family, one of whom was from Java and the other a Balinese. They were wonderful people who looked after us extremely well and had a very positive attitude to Australia (albeit somewhat influenced, obviously, by the fact that Australian tourists provide much of their livelihood).

We were particularly struck by the very strong dependence of the Balinese on tourism for their livelihood and, since the Bali bombing, we cannot get the pictures out of our mind of Balinese women and children desperate to make a sale of sarongs, T-shirts, post-cards, carvings, etc in order to feed their families. We are very concerned about the impact of a drop in tourism on these people.

On our travels with our Indonesian family, we were accepted as a member of the family by not only the immediate family (mother, father, brother and sister) but also of the extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins, who are keen for us to go back and stay with them, even after only a single meeting. Friends of our Indonesian daughter even called us "mum" and "dad". It was also interesting that the two maids, despite being rather shy, were keen to have their photo taken with us so they could show it off back in their village.

Everywhere we went we were warmly welcomed by all of the Indonesians we met, despite being something of a curiosity in some of the more remote locations where the people had obviously seen few, if any, westerners.

We were particularly struck by the good nature and happiness of the people, the poverty and difficult circumstances in which many people live and the prevalence of corruption which, if not addressed (an extremely difficult task since it pervades all levels of society) will hinder attempts to improve the lot of ordinary Indonesians.

#### INDONESIANS' KNOWLEDGE OF AUSTRALIA

Ordinary Indonesians have very little knowledge of Australia and their opinions are largely formed by what is reported in the media, and media reporting appears to be heavily influenced by the media's perception of the governmental relations.

The following three examples illustrate this point.

1. Before our Indonesian daughter came to Australia, Australian troops were involved in East Timor. Her grandmother was extremely concerned for her safety in Australia because she believed that Australia was at war with Indonesia and she thought that she would become a prisoner of war if she came to Australia.
2. One of our Indonesian daughter's cousins is coming to Australia to go to university next year and we were questioned by her father as to whether she would be safe in Australia, particularly as a Muslim.
3. After the recent ASIO raids, we received a phone call from our Indonesian daughter's mother to check the accuracy of Indonesian television reports that Australia was deporting all Muslims from the country. She intends to tell all her friends that this is not the case, but the question remains as to how many others believe such reports.

It is clear from these examples that, if Australia is to develop and maintain good relations with Indonesia, we need to be sensitive to the manner in which Australia's actions will be reported in the Indonesian media and perceived by the people. In our view, the ASIO raids were an absolute debacle. Surely, before undertaking such actions, someone with knowledge of Indonesia should have been consulted about the potential impact on Australian-Indonesian relations of such actions and advice could have been given as to more appropriate ways of handling such situations. The negative impact of such insensitive actions can take a long time to redress.

### INDONESIA AND AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY

While we are not experts in foreign affairs, but we have come to the view that the greatest threat to Australia is from extremists in the world's Islamic nations. This threat is not from invasion, but from terrorism.

We are also of the view that this threat stems largely from our excessively overt support of American foreign policy.

In a nutshell the logic for this view, somewhat simplified, is as follows:

- The US is seen to be anti-Muslim as a result of its support for Israel and its failure to recognise that a long-term solution must involve a secure home for the Palestinians. As long as this situation prevails there will be anti-American sentiment among the world's Muslim communities and extremists will have support from more moderate Muslims and those, who through lack of education and access to a range of information sources, will believe what they are being told by extremists;
- It is extremely easy, because of Australia's overt support for America, for extremists to view Australia as being anti-Muslim and to convey this to other Muslims, who, because they have no other source of information, will believe it.

Accordingly, while our support for the war on terrorism has the best possible motives, participation in the American version is likely to reduce Australia's security, not improve it. While ever the US is viewed as anti-Muslim as a result of support for Israel, their version of the war on terrorism is doomed to failure.

The war on terrorism, to be successful, must be a social war, not a military style war (using the word "military" somewhat loosely to describe the current approach).

Most of the people of the Muslim nations of the world live in poverty, with little or no education and it is easy for extremists to garner support for their views. They are essentially powerless to improve their lot in life and, being the "have nots" it is easy for extremists to engender antagonism towards the "haves" of the word – primarily western nations.

To be successful, the war on terrorism needs to address the root cause and become a war on poverty in the world.

Australia is not in a position to solve all the world's problems, although we have, in the past, made a significant contribution - in accepting refugees, for example.

We are, however, in a position to make a difference in our immediate neighbourhood and Indonesia (and probably Malaysia) is a good place to start.

But it needs to be borne in mind that, while ever there is a perception that we are supporting a US-style aggressive war on terrorism, that perception will undermine the benefits to be gained by engaging in a social war on terrorism.

### PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Australia can help Indonesia in many ways and we do not intend to try and catalogue a large list, but rather to suggest some principles which need to be taken into account in providing assistance, though we do make one specific suggestion based on our experience in being a host family to an exchange student.

1. Assistance in the form of monetary aid will be of limited benefit due to the impact of widespread corruption;
2. Assistance needs to be given in such a way that we are not seen as interfering in Indonesia's affairs;
3. We should work with the Indonesians to help them make Indonesia a safe place for Australians - both from a tourist and business perspective;
4. We should undertake programs that visibly assist ordinary Indonesians and which have a multiplier effect on perceptions of Australia - ie not only do the people directly assisted benefit and understand the contribution being made by Australia, but also other parts of the Indonesian community understand and value the contribution being made;
5. We should develop such a good relationship with the Indonesian government that the Indonesian government wants to publicly extol the virtues of Australia.

Based on our experience as a host family, we believe that encouraging and assisting more such exchange opportunities, and providing assistance for Indonesians to come and study in Australia would, over time, develop a better understanding of, and a positive attitude to, Australia among people who are likely to become leaders in business, government or the community.

In the year that we hosted our Indonesian daughter, there were only five students from Indonesia in the AFS exchange program. They were selected on strict criteria as suitable Indonesian ambassadors with the potential to benefit from the program. However, due to the cost involved, such opportunities are currently only available to relatively well-off families.

Such programs have a very significant multiplier effect, because of the positive attitude to Australia which is developed, not only by the student, but also by family and friends in Indonesia. It is further enhanced, as in our situation, when host families visit Indonesia to meet family and friends.

We were rather disappointed that, when our Indonesian daughter asked us to enquire about scholarships to attend university in Australia, the best we could find would only cover one quarter of the tuition fees, so she could not afford to come to Australia. However, being an intelligent girl, she was able to win a full scholarship from an American company to attend a branch of an American university in Malaysia. It is unfortunate that Australia has lost the opportunity to further enhance her understanding of and relationship with Australia.

#### CONCLUSION

A good relationship with Indonesia is extremely important to Australia and should be fostered by practical, but sensitive, assistance to the people with the active support and participation of the Indonesian Government.

We would like to note that the views expressed above were developed during our visit to Indonesia and after our return, but before the Bali bombing. The Bali bombing only served to reinforce our views.

We hope that this submission will be of some assistance to the Sub-Committee in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Graham and Lyn Beatty

