



Submission No 32

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.

As a high school teacher of Indonesian Language and Culture, I would like to make the following comments.

Indonesian educators across Australia have been working for years to build bridges between our students and Indonesian people. We are in effect de facto cultural ambassadors for Australia, but we rely on Commonwealth support to continue our work.

For the last 4 years we have made use of NALSAS funding which targeted the teaching of 4 priority Asian languages, including Indonesian. This has enabled us to:

- Teach Indonesian in years 5 and 6 in primary schools.
- Develop up-to-date resources.
- Have an Indonesian Consultant who provides information and support to teachers and students.
- Undergo training and development courses including the studying of Indonesian in Indonesia.
- Take student groups to Indonesia to further their study of the language.
- Pay for teachers from Indonesia to work in Australian schools through Access Asia grants.

The Commonwealth announced it would cease this funding at the end of this year. This decision must be revoked if we wish to understand and engage with our closest neighbour.

The recent Bali bombings has highlighted the importance of our relationship with Indonesia. As Peter Costello said last week “ At these points of crisis we must not withdraw. We must heighten our engagement and our cooperation. We must work together. Australia stands ready to do so.”

Supporting the network of Indonesian educators in this country would be a very positive first step. Reinstating NALSAS funding can do this.

Other suggestions for building our cultural links include:

- Offering more scholarships for Indonesian post-graduate students.
- Initiating an Australia wide Indonesian teacher exchange programme which would pay for Indonesian teachers to work in our schools and universities along with their Australian counterparts. (Remembering that most Indonesian educators are not native speakers)
- Support for students and teachers to work or study in Indonesia when it is safe to do so.
- Initiating a scholarship programme for Indonesian artists and musicians to run workshops in Australia. E.g. Traditional gamelan musicians or batik craftspeople.
- Offer scholarships for students who wish to continue their studies of Indonesian at tertiary level. The number of these students dropped dramatically after our involvement in East Timor. There is now a shortage of Indonesian language experts in the ADF and ASIO, for example.

I hope these suggestions are useful. If you would like any further information or comments , please contact me at this e-mail address: bluefig@ozemail.com.au

Yours sincerely,

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