



Submission No 67

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: Alice Springs Language Centre

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The Secretary
 Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee
 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
 Defence & Trade

Alice Springs Language Centre
 Box 9045
 Alice Springs 0871
 23 October 2002

Parliament House
 Canberra
 ACT 2600
 Fax 02-6277-2221

Dear Mr Lawson:

SUBMISSION TO JSCFADT ON AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH INDONESIA: THE NALSAS PROGRAM

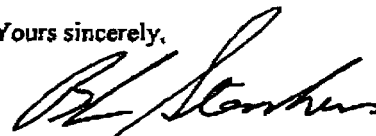
The recent events in Bali and the aftermath highlight the need for there to be a critical mass of people in Australia with more than superficial knowledge of Indonesian culture and language. In connection with this concept of "critical mass", one can well ask such questions as "How many Australians in the current teams investigating the terrorist attack in Bali can speak Indonesian even superficially?" and "How many Australian ambassadors since the establishment of the Republic of Indonesian have been able to speak Indonesian?"

The Federal Government's planned curtailment of the NALSAS (National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools) program means that this "critical mass" objective stands less chance of being realised than would otherwise be the case. Without this critical mass, Australia stands a good chance of following a less than ideal path in its relationship with Indonesia, a path based on ignorance rather than knowledge. Firstly, there would not be enough people in the long term to fill positions for which knowledge of Indonesian culture and language are required (at least in an ideal sense); secondly, there would not be enough people in the wider society to contribute from a position of knowledge and insight to the informed public debate necessary for adequate coverage of the issues as policy is devised and implemented.

To underline my claim above of the desirability of Australians having informed knowledge of Indonesian culture and language, I would outline that when I was living in Indonesia, in Irian Jaya (now Papua), the Australian ambassador and his party on a visit made absolute fools of themselves through their over-the-top emphasis on the providing of alcoholic beverages at an official reception. Had they had even superficial knowledge of Indonesian culture, they would not have done what they did. (The locals at the airport were astounded to observe one of the ambassador's aircraft, an RAAF Caribou, literally stacked full of beer!) By contrast, a visit by the New Zealand ambassador and his party while I was there was much more in keeping with Indonesian sensitivities concerning alcohol. While on the subject of diplomats, I would need to point out that the most popular ambassador with the Indonesians when I lived on Java was the German ambassador who could speak fluent native-speaker-like Indonesian!

My recommendation is that the NALSAS program, at least as far as the teaching of Indonesian language and culture is concerned, be allowed to run its planned course of ten years. Ideally, of course, the program should be allowed to run as long as there is a deficit of people with the aforementioned language and culture skills.

Yours sincerely,



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 Teacher of Indonesian
 Alice Springs Language Centre

