

EAST TIMOR UPDATE

Bulletin of the Peter Trust

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Election Year in East Timor

This year has been an important one for the consolidation of **democracy** in East Timor, and in furthering national **development**.

In May a new *President* was elected in a two-stage process, the victorious candidate being Taur Matan Ruak, a former top commander in the sustained guerrilla resistance to the Indonesian occupation from 1975-1999.

He has taken over the role from Jose Ramos Horta, Nobel Peace Prize co-laureate in 1996, who had in turn succeeded Xanana Gusmao - the charismatic leader of the national Resistance who became the first President after political liberation was finally achieved.

Xanana continues in office as Prime Minister, heading up his National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction party (CNRT) in a coalition Government peacefully elected in July. CNRT acts in collaboration with two

minor parties – the Democratic Party (PD), and Fretilin-Mundaca, a break-away group from the once dominant *FRETILIN* (which was historically the party that campaigned most vigorously for East Timor's independence but since 1999 has fractured and lost public confidence).

An admirable feature of the political processes undergone this year is that they have been complete without any significant violence beyond some resentful rock-throwing by a few disaffected *Fretilin* youth that was quickly clamped down on by their veteran leaders.

No small credit for the non-violence must go to the 111 day '**Peace Campaign**' which was the initiative of the Dili Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission and was supported by Catholic Relief Services, a relief and development agency of the US RC church.

On February 11th, the day this campaign was launched, a crowd of

10,000 people flooded the main road through the capital city Dili with candles in their hands, walking under the hot tropical sun, singing songs and reciting prayers for peace.

“It was very amazing” recalled Fr Justiniano de Sousa SDB, a Salesian priest who participated. “There could not have been a more powerful message for peace in this war-torn land of Timor” he said, while watching the national TV coverage of the march which was broadcast to the entire country the following day. The Peter Trust has given financial support to the Dili J&P over a number of years and its Director at that time was Sr Clare Garcilliano SPC, one of the Trust’s agents in the territory.



[Sr Clare with the J&P group – the motor bike on which Fr Pat sits was provided by the Peter Trust]

Florentino Sarmento, a Timorese partner relations and capacity building manager for CRS in East Timor, remarked:

“I have seen my country mired in conflict. I have lived through 3 major periods of violence that swept Timor from tip to tip, from 1975 until the most recent internal strife in 2006. Finally, the Timorese can celebrate the peace and stability that we have prayed for these many years. ...

But the path forward is still challenging. Along with difficulties such as the fragility of state institutions and lack of a skilled and experienced work force, more than 50% of our people still live in absolute poverty.

However, despite all the odds we are ready to face the future with hope.” [Cited from <http://crs-blog.org/east-timor-seeks-and-finds-peace>]

The New Government’s Development Programme

The Constitution of Timor-Leste (section 108) requires each incoming Government to submit its programme to the National Parliament for consideration thirty days after the swearing in of the Prime Minister and other members of the Government.

In his presentation of the programme on September 14th Xanana Gusmao explained that the overarching commitment of the (Fifth) Constitutional Government was “to support and promote the development of Timor-Leste and to strive to improve the living conditions of our People”.

The five-year programme is in line with the Strategic Development Plan 2011-2013 “to have a population that is healthy, educated, safe, self-sufficient, with access to justice and to all essential gifts and services”.

Xanana outlined the four main areas of the programme emphasising that infrastructure development is the driving force of national development in order to give access to health, schools, markets, industries and businesses:

“To realise the full potential of Timorese people we need economic development and job creation” he said, before indicating specific plans for the next five years “to build a modern and diversified economy, based on agriculture, tourism and the petroleum industry, with a growing private sector and the creation of opportunities for all Timorese citizens”.

Xanana then declared the Government’s aims to “promote good governance and develop a public sector that is professional, respectable, responsible, and efficient”.

It is not surprising that this proposed Programme received no opposition in Parliament - but what is actually *achievable* in a five year period is far from sure. The wide ranging needs that are to be addressed by the Programme indicate how far East Timor has to go! What is clear is that for the foreseeable future the support that the *Peter Trust* can give towards projects in health provision, education and training, and in income generation, remain as important as ever.

Peter Trust Continuing Support

Since the last *East Timor Update* the Trust has disbursed US\$34,000 in its support of long term projects.

Specifically, the Trust funds...

The work of the ALMA Sisters with their care of 70 severely handicapped children and their parents;

Meets the costs of the annual accommodation and training of 10 senior students (boys and girls) in the Salesian technical college in Dili;

Sponsors 20 High School students in the parish of Railaku in the central highlands whose families are too poor to provide anything towards their education;

Having paid for an *asrama* or boarding house in Baocnana (in the Oecussi enclave) the Trust this year begins its contributions (with two significant tranches of funding) for the construction of another near Viqueque in the far East of Timor Leste. These hostels are for school students who live in remote villages, enabling them to access secondary education and develop social and domestic skills;

Sponsors the education of 10 disabled young people resident in the *Ahisaun* hostel set up by Fr Adri Ola [*see picture of the hostel musicians below*]



The Trust has provided seeds and tools for the creation of a highly productive kitchen garden and pastoral farmstead - worked by the Dili orphans - at Hera, 30 minutes drive from the city.

As well as now meeting many of the dietary needs of the orphans in residence this project has proved to be an income generator – raising funds from the sale of young animals bred on the farmstead, and from fruit and vegetables grown in the extensive (two acre) garden which are surplus to the requirements of the orphanage.

New Appeals to the Peter Trust

There have been two recent appeals made to the Trust to which Trustees have unanimously agreed to respond as best and as soon as we can:

For over a decade the Peter Trust has been providing funds annually for the Sisters of St Paul of Chartres to purchase medicines and provide treatment at their **Hospital** in Suai, a town on the south coast, and via their **Mobile Clinic** to five villages each week in the countryside round about. The Trust support includes the salary of a full time doctor (Dr Benilda), a Lab Technician, two Timorese nurses, and Manuel, the Driver/Mechanic. The Sisters have this year expanded their work into the mountain village of Turiscaï (where last year the Trust provided chairs for the secondary school) and at the same time the number of their patients in the Suai district has increased. They have

appealed for an additional \$10,000 to meet the additional demands.



[Fr Pat with Suai hospital team & Manuel (on right) mobile clinic driver]

In Maliana, a southern town near to the border with Indonesian West Timor, a secondary school has recently been taken over by personnel of the Sons of Divine Providence (SVD) religious congregation who have appealed for help in the installation of **toilets** for this mixed high school for over 200 teenage boys and girls. The existing provision would, in the UK, be condemned as a health risk and demolished. In any case it is quite inadequate to meet the needs of this large number of older students. Again, a sum of \$10,000 would provide what is urgently required.

Imminent withdrawal of UN Mission to East Timor

The UN has been present in East Timor since May 1999 when its first 'Mission of Assistance' - UNAMET - was charged with conducting the referendum about the country's political future, viz. Independence or a degree of autonomy within the Indonesian Republic. The outcome of that vote in which the electorate bravely participated was undeniably in favour of independent nationhood.

For the next three years the UN actually ran the country as the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), with the principal aim of enabling the nation to

form its own national Government – which was established 2002.

The UN continued to assist the young nation until the present time with a succession of Missions each taking less responsibility than its predecessor and with UN personnel gradually handing over organisation and development to Timorese counterparts (UN Mission of Support; UN Mission of Integration). By the end of this year the advisers and their teams will mostly withdraw, although a small contingent will remain for a while. This has become possible because of positive developments in national security, political stability, and in the civic institutions of the newly born country – which is no longer the youngest in the world.

However, that stability is fragile, the institutions not yet fully in place, and the social fabric weak. All that has been achieved could so easily be lost if there is no evident improvement in the lot of the great majority of the population who continue to live in severe poverty, and in the creation of jobs to engage the energies and skills of the 20,000 young people who leave school each summer.

Whatever the Peter Trust can do via the various projects to which it contributes to support this poor country in its first tentative steps towards economic and social development is of much more importance than the limits of our financial help would suggest.

In East Timor a little funding goes a long way and every contribution does more to bind the people together and to hearten their earnest endeavours than we in this country might expect.

Many thanks to all our donors!