

Canadian Centre
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Development



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EAST TIMOR ROUNDTABLE REPORT

Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

February 22, 1999 (Ottawa)

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February 23, 1999

Dear Minister,

Yesterday senior officials, including Ambassador Ken Sunquist, Ingrid Hall, and CIDA officials met with four East Timor community activists and 18 Canadian NGO representatives, academics, and others to discuss the on-the-ground situation in East Timor and the needs and opportunities for peace building by Canada and Canadians.

The sobering picture presented by the guests from East Timor of armed militia, anarchy and violence, deep divisions in society, and a growing cycle of revenge killings suggests a real possibility of wide-spread violence and bloodshed, potentially escalating into a civil war in coming months.

With that in mind the roundtable strongly recommended that **Canada use our seat on the Security Council to flag the possibility of civil war and press the Council to take appropriate action to prevent conflict and maintain peace and security in East Timor.**

Participants also recommended **the creation of a Foreign Ministers' Friend of East Timor contact and action group.**

(It was not known to the roundtable participants that the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, has already proposed such a Friends' Group. Nevertheless, you may want to make a public comment about the value of such a Group and your willingness to participate.)

The roundtable recommended that the Friends of East Timor Foreign Minister's Group could:

- support the UN process and exert pressure on the Indonesian government to allow UN presence in the area,
- press for an immediate cease-fire and follow up disarmament and demilitarization. This step should include efforts to prevent increased arming of the paramilitary by Indonesian army,
- act as an early warning system and a quick reaction group for any crisis,
- participate in preparing a viable framework for transition.

The participants stressed the urgency for action (two months window) and the opportunity for Canada to play a leading role in this initiative. Potential member countries could include: Canada, Australia, United States, Japan, Great Britain, Portugal, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Ireland, Thailand.

The participants further emphasized the need for a UN or other outside presence in East Timor to help prevent conflict.

Canada is urged to pressure Indonesia on East Timor.

The day's discussion focussed mostly on the urgent need for conflict prevention. However, longer terms issues were also addressed, including:

- helping to strengthen East Timor civil society to undertake domestic peacebuilding
- possible training (re-training) of army and police
- donor coordination
- International Financial Institutions (IFI) coordination
- NGO coordination
- strengthening NGO networks and state-NGO partnerships
- Canadian support/shared experience in negotiations, mediation and reconciliation efforts
- compensation and justice process for victims of war crimes.

CIDA officials shared some information about the Peace Building Fund and CIDA's abilities to respond or not to these needs. The guests from East Timor concluded the meeting by urging Canada to take a lead on East Timor, with a warning to prepare for the worst in coming months, and with a call for immediate cease-fire efforts.

You may want to include a reference to this public consultation in your media release and comments this week.

Sincerely

Steve Lee
Executive Director/CCFPD

REPORT ON THE EAST TIMOR ROUNDTABLE

Ottawa, February 22, 1999

I. Background of the Current Situation in East Timor

The current situation in East Timor (as described by the four East Timorese guests) can be characterised as extremely serious and fluid. According to Florentino Sarmiento of the Komnas Ham, clashes between proponents of independence and those supporting integration are exacerbated by additional cleavages within the East Timorese society that have developed as a result of the long standing conflict between the East Timorese and the Indonesian government.

Indeed, a "cycle of revenge" feeds ever increasing incidents of violence, especially among youth. Wide-spread lawlessness has come to characterise every-day life of the East Timorese. The Indonesian military is arming the pro-integration forces and civilians take up weapons, either in desperation or for monetary gain. A "culture of violence" spreads resulting in an increase in gross human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrest, detention, arbitrary execution, disappearances, torture, rape, sexual abuse, intimidation, and the removal of citizens from their residences. Teachers, nurses, doctors, midwives, and other essential personnel have already begun to leave troubled areas as the wave of violence intensifies, leading to a societal disintegration.

Notwithstanding past and present efforts of the Canadian government, including Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), and Canadians in development and peace building projects, the East Timorese urged Canada to take immediate action to stem the growing instability and suffering in the region.

An outside intervention for a cease-fire followed by disarmament, perhaps coordinated by Canada, is perceived as absolutely necessary to prevent a looming civil war and to ensure at least limited level of security for the East Timorese people.

The history of good relations between the Canadian and Indonesian governments bodes well for Canada to undertake such a role. The activists also expressed a desire for Canada to continue to assist the East Timorese beyond the short time horizon. Armido Maia, the former Vice-rector of the University of Timor, appealed for Canadian assistance in launching a genuine process of reconciliation. The message was pointedly summed up by Manuel Abrantes of Bishop Belo's Peace and Justice Commission, the East Timorese are asking Canadians for help, hoping for a short term leadership and a long term friendship.

Ken Sunquist, the Canadian Ambassador to Indonesia, also contributed to painting a picture of the troubled region. He stressed the importance of Canada as an ODA donor in East Timor. Furthermore, he contended that Indonesia is unlikely to fund autonomy if separation is the ultimate goal and pointed out that East Timor is increasingly perceived as a burden by the Indonesian government. He drew attention to the position of Portugal and Australia towards the recent developments and suggested that the Portuguese government would most likely not support the autonomy option unless the East Timorese have a decisive say in determining their own destiny.

Meanwhile, the Australian government tends to favour autonomy based on past political and diplomatic contexts. The Ambassador also discussed the important role of the Church – the most trusted institution in East Timor and the rising fears of civil war within society due to widespread uncertainty. In conclusion of his presentation, he put forth the following principles Canada should take into consideration:

- 1) support for negotiations at the UN,
- 2) immediate cease-fire,
- 3) de-militarisation, and
- 4) continued funding.

While he expressed optimism about the success of political solutions, the Ambassador was concerned about changing the ascending "culture of violence" within the East Timorese society.

II Immediate Plan for Action

The round-table participants forged a consensus on the immediate necessity of an outside presence in East Timor to stem possible civil war and enhance security of the East Timorese. A two-month window for action was identified. In addition it was agreed that Canada should take a leading role in this process based on:

- Canada's good relations with the Indonesian government,
- Minister Axworthy's interest in the region,
- Canada's membership on the Security Council, and
- active involvement of the Canadian government and NGOs in East Timor development efforts.

This role could be played either through:

- UN Security Council
- Foreign Ministers' Friends of East Timor Group
- Canada's own initiatives.

It was suggested that Canada use its seat on the **Security Council** to flag the possibility of civil war and press the Council to take immediate action to prevent escalation of the conflict and maintain peace and security in East Timor. Here, lessons from Rwanda should be drawn upon to generate political will and mobilise UN resources. While this was fully endorsed, some participants raised the issue that a placement of UN peace-keeping troops could prove unacceptable to the Indonesian government at least until a final decision about the future of East Timor is made. Reflecting on the experience of Haiti with UN peace-keeping troops, others pointed out the danger of perceiving UN forces as a neo-colonial invasion. Some participants, suggested that other opportunities have to be explored.

Given the contentious nature of this path of action as well as the difficulty of forging an all inclusive international consensus, it was proposed that Canada takes a lead in the context of a Foreign Ministers' Friends of East Timor Group. This group could either compliment or be independent of the UN process. It could act as a contact and an action group, flexible enough to function as an early warning mechanism and ready to react expeditiously to fast changing circumstances. It could be precisely this group that initiates international activity. More specifically this Group could:

- a) exert pressure on the Indonesian government to allow an outside presence in the area and participate in other processes aimed at stabilisation of East Timor,
- b) **press for an immediate cease-fire and follow-up disarmament and demilitarisation (this step should include efforts to prevent increased arming of the para-military by the Indonesian army), the participants recognised this point to be the *sine qua non* of any further action**
- c) after the situation has been stabilised, start planning and thinking about the medium and long term needs of the East Timorese.

Other potential member countries of the Ministers' Group included: Australia, United States, Japan, Great Britain, Portugal, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Ireland, Thailand, Chile, Brazil, the South East Asia region as well as the UN.

Third, in addition and/or in case the creation of the Foreign Ministers' Friends of East Timor Group is hindered and the UN is slow to react for one reason or another, **Canada should undertake its own initiatives** on activities outlined in points a), b), and c).

III. Medium and Long Term Vision

In the medium and long term Canada, either on its own or in the context of a Minister's Friends of East Timor Group and/or the UN could help the East Timorese in the following areas:

* Coordinate donor countries, IFIs, and foreign NGO activities to avoid duplication and redundant demands for assessment studies. Once again Canada could take steps towards this goal with, perhaps, CIDA playing a role.

* **Support the reconciliation initiatives by providing Canadian experience in negotiations and mediation in conflict.** Canada could take the lead in supporting dialogue within East Timor society by providing training in mediation and negotiation, setting up mechanisms that would prevent violent action-reaction dynamics.

* Support reconciliation by facilitating compensation and due justice processes for victims of war crimes. Florentino Sarmiento noted there has been no process whereby perpetrator of crimes were brought to justice and victims compensated. He expressed doubts about the viability of reconciliation without steps towards addressing this situation. Since solidarity of the East Timorese people has been broken a need for an accommodative “neutral” Council to deal with transition is in order. The necessity and difficulty of disarming para-militaries and re-integrating militant personnel back into the society was pointed out.

* Initiate action to address psycho-social and physical trauma experienced especially by children in conflict areas. Experiences with such initiatives in Nigeria and Rwanda would be particularly instructive. Such initiatives could potentially contribute to the development of culture of cooperation and communication based on tolerance.

* Helping to strengthen East Timorese civil society to undertake domestic peace and institution building. To enable a genuine transformation of East Timorese institutions for the East Timorese, there is a need for capacity building. David Rhody from CARE Canada presented some of the initiatives now under way in East Timor such a training indigenous staff to administer CARE programmes in agriculture, sanitation and clean water. Jacques Bertrand of University of Toronto expressed concern about the imminent institutional vacuum that is to come on the heels of escalating conflict or Indonesian withdrawal, capacity building initiatives should address this problem immediately. According to Norm MacDonnel from CIDA, supporting activities such as the use of media and grass roots discussions could help to develop a culture of tolerance and prepare the way for democracy. Furthermore, initiatives supporting the planning and strengthening of East Timorese provincial government were briefly addressed.

* **Helping to strengthen East Timorese NGO networks and state-NGO partnership.** Antonio Conceicao, CARE officer in Dili, expressed the necessity of coordinating local NGOs, perhaps by working with a Forum of NGOs in East Timor, in order to take better advantage of outside assistance. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of grassroots initiatives and the developing links between leaders and society (to build trust).

IV. Conclusion

The participants concluded by stressing the grave nature of the current situation in East Timor. **They stressed the clear danger of civil war if no action is taken.** Some outside presence is absolutely necessary to stem imminent civil war and enhance the personal security of the East Timorese people. The identified channels of action were the Security Council, Foreign Ministers’ Friends of East Timor Group, Canada’s own initiatives or a combination of the three. While

immediate intervention aimed at a cease-fire and disarmament is the sine qua non of all further initiatives, thinking should start about how to approach medium and long term reconciliation and development needs of the East Timorese.

EAST TIMOR ROUNDTABLE

**Monday, February 22, 1999
Government Conference Centre
Colonel By Room
2 Rideau Street
Ottawa, Ontario**

8:45-9:00	Coffee
9:00-9:10	Welcome Steve Lee, National Director Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development
9:10-9:20	Roundtable Introductions
9:20-9:30	Welcome Ingrid Hall Director General, South and Southeast Asia Bureau
9:30-10:15	Capacity Building and Peacebuilding Needs East Timor Guests
10:15-11:00	Situation update Ken Sunquist Canada's Ambassador to Indonesia
11:00-11:15	Break
11:15-12:30	Discussion
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-15:00	Discussion
15:00-15:15	Break
15:15-16:30	Policy options
16:30-17:00	Conclusion wrap-up

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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EAST TIMORESE

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