

A Problem that can be fixed is a small problem indeed

There are a great many problems which Australia is facing: the housing and homelessness crises, the effects of climate change, international tensions, the fear of "lone wolf" attacks, among others. Yet there is one problem which Australia could end tomorrow, and that is the matter of the border in the Timor Sea between Australia and Timor-Leste.¹ It needs Australians to rise to the occasion as was done on behalf of the Timorese people in 1999. We can do this: please read on.

Australia is making it very difficult for the Timorese people to secure the final act of sovereignty for their nation: a fair and permanent border in the Timor Sea. It is deeply embarrassing that Australia has had to be dragged to a Compulsory Conciliation, a United Nations mechanism which may facilitate an agreement, but which may not.²

It is sad that Australia is choosing to engage in the mercenary tactics of profit at all costs. It has even been alleged that Australian agencies spied on Timorese negotiators. The fairness and decency which are claimed as Australian "values" are those which current international standards seek to protect. Yet these seem to take second place to an Australian determination to have its own way, even though its case on the Timor Sea issues rests on the defunct principle of the "continental shelf" instead of the internationally accepted "median line".

The Timorese people are used to bad news. Their endurance and suffering in World War II became legendary, certainly in the minds of those Australian soldiers who lives they saved in 1942. The loyalty of the Timorese was the very cause of Japanese reprisals when the Australians left. The Timorese death toll was enormous. Then they were invaded by Indonesia in 1975 and occupied for 24 years. Unfortunately, Australia acquiesced to Indonesian plans and supported the annexation.³

Despite all this, there have been no Timorese accusations towards Australia, no calls for recompense, no revenge for the decades of fence-sitting. There has been only thanks for the eleventh-hour turnaround in 1999 when Australians supported the UN referendum and led the peacekeepers.

The Timorese are not asking for handouts, special treatment, nor even remembrance of the history. All they want is a fair and permanent border based on current international law and practice. That is all. Australia could agree to this tomorrow.

Please sign the petition⁴ asking our Parliament to bring this problem to an end. That outcome is entirely within the power of the Australian Parliament to accomplish straight away. Please copy the petition on paper, get some signatures and return it to the address stated. There's some background material⁵ too. The petition will be on the Parliament website in June, so people who go online can sign it there instead.

A problem that can be fixed is a small problem indeed.

Susan Connelly RSJ
23 April 2017

¹ <http://timfo.org/>

² <http://timfo.org/new-blog-avenue/2017/4/19/red-flags-the-jscot-report-and-the-latest-pca-release>

³ See for example James Dunn, *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence*, 3rd ed. (Double Bay, NSW: Longueville Books, 2003).

⁴ <http://timfo.org/new-blog-avenue/2017/4/12/formal-petition-to-the-house-of-representatives-1>

⁵ <http://timfo.org/new-blog-avenue/2017/4/12/formal-petition-to-the-house-of-representatives-1>

