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EAST TIMOR AND CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Submission to the

**Special Joint Committee
Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy**

from the

Portuguese-Canadian National Congress

June 1994
(4 pp.)

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INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese Canadian National Congress welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the foreign policy review committee. We would like to focus our presentation on one major issue regarding Canadian foreign policy: the question of East Timor. East Timor highlights many of the problems with the current thrust of Canada's foreign policy.

The Portuguese Canadian National Congress is a national organization composed of individuals, associations, social service agencies and community groups working on behalf of the interests of Canadians of Portuguese origin, a community of over 300,000 people.

Portuguese Canadians have a strong concern about the people of East Timor. East Timor was a Portuguese colony for 500 years. The two nations have common historical, cultural, linguistic and even ethnic links. Intermarriages between Portuguese and Timorese were common. The two peoples share many traditions and have shared ancestries. Many Portuguese now living in Canada have lived or served in East Timor. Timor has always held a special place in the hearts of Portuguese who were there.

We do not regard East Timor with a paternalistic, colonial attitude. The 1974 revolution in Portugal, which overthrew the Salazar-Caetano dictatorship, saw the independence of Portugal's overseas colonies. In the case of East Timor, sadly, a brutal invasion choked off moves towards independence.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN EAST TIMOR

In 1975, East Timor declared its independence. Ten days later, the Indonesian dictatorship invaded. The United Nations still recognizes Portugal as the administering power, and sponsors talks on East Timor between Portugal and Indonesia. These talks still leave out the most concerned party: the people of East Timor themselves.

We support the right of the people of East Timor to determine their own future through fair and impartial elections. All indications are that the bulk of the population, if given the choice, would choose to become an independent country.

Since the invasion, more than 200,000 people (or, one third of the original East Timorese population of 700,000) have been murdered or have died from starvation caused by the Indonesian occupation, according to Prof. Barbedo de Magalhães and Amnesty International. Countless others have been raped, tortured, executed singly or in mass executions of whole villages, relocated against their will or imprisoned, as reported on

numerous occasions by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch-Asia, sources in the Timorese Catholic Church and others.

Human rights abuses continue to this day. In November 1992, the leader of the East Timorese resistance, José Alexandre Xanana Gusmão, was arrested and later sentenced to life imprisonment for "rebellion" in what most observers rejected as a show trial. Xanana holds the same position in the minds and hearts of his people as Nelson Mandela held in South Africa. He is generally acknowledged to be the true leader of his people, held illegally by a government that has no right to imprison him.

Just days before the writing of this brief, Amnesty International reported that three Timorese youths had been sentenced to 20-month jail terms for the "crime" of marching through the streets of Dili, the capital of East Timor, with pro-independence signs. This is typical of the human rights abuses that go on every day in Indonesian-occupied East Timor.

It is not just the people of East Timor who have suffered: massive environmental degradation has been another result of Indonesian military rule.

There have also been reports of an Indonesian-government-sponsored sterilization campaign targeting Timorese women and of forced abortions. The U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops has denounced this campaign as "tantamount to genocide."

Finally, the East Timorese are being subjected to cultural genocide. In the words of Msgr. Carlos Ximenes Belo, the Catholic Bishop of Dili, "we are dying as a people and as a nation."

The Indonesian dictatorship is trying to wipe out the Timorese as a distinct people by banning or restricting their traditional languages, traditions and cultures. Before the invasion, East Timor was an anthropological treasure trove, home to 30 distinct ethno-linguistic groups, according to Dr. Ruy Cinatti. Under Indonesian occupation, most of these cultures stand on the brink of extinction.

In December 1991, the Indonesian military shut down São José High School in Dili, the only remaining school teaching in Portuguese and Tetum, the traditional lingua franca of East Timor.

Canada's commitment to multiculturalism and the preservation of languages is highly regarded throughout the world, and places Canada in a unique position of being able to foster these values internationally. Where cultures and languages are being destroyed, as in East Timor, Canada should be working to preserve them.

CANADA'S RECORD ON EAST TIMOR

Canada has always stressed the importance of human rights. Our record with regards to South Africa, Haiti and Serbia is one of refusing to bankroll repression. However, when it comes to Indonesia, which is one of the worst human rights abusers in the world, the Canadian record falls far short.

Successive Canadian governments have stood in support of the Indonesian dictatorship. At the United Nations, Canada has opposed resolutions calling for self-determination for the East Timorese people, their right under the UN Charter. In 1982, Canada even opposed a resolution calling for humanitarian aid and peace talks. This is a shameful record for a country which prides itself on its international work for peace and human rights.

We are pleased that Canada, in 1993 and 1994, finally backed positive resolutions supporting the Timorese people at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, along with the European Community and countries in Africa and Latin America. However, nothing has been done to enforce these resolutions. The Canadian government should be working multilaterally with countries like Portugal, Ireland and the Lusophone countries (Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guiné-Bissau, Cabo-Verde, São Tomé & Príncipe), to support the efforts of these nations in taking measures to isolate Indonesia.

We are also pleased that Canada has made no sales of military equipment to Indonesia since 1991. However, this action also falls short. Some goods, such as Pratt and Whitney helicopter engines, are not classified as military goods even though they are used to power Indonesian military aircraft. Additionally, Canadian component parts find their way into weapons systems assembled in other countries, which are re-exported to Indonesia without their "made-in-Canada" label. Export controls need to be tightened, and a formal arms embargo should become a goal of Canadian foreign policy. Canada has worked for a multilateral arms embargo against Burma — why another against Indonesia, a country much admired by the Burmese generals.

Indonesia has also been a priority for Canadian aid money, receiving between \$35 million and \$70 million in aid from the Canadian International Development Agency. Last year Indonesia ranked second among CIDA's bilateral aid recipients.

On the one hand CIDA is moving towards a more participatory model of development, with special attention to women and grassroots projects, a laudable direction. On the other hand Canada continues to bankroll a government whose actions — not only in East Timor but in Indonesia itself — serve to undermine these worthy goals.

With government control so pervasive in Indonesia, it is questionable whether aid dollars are actually reaching the poorest people. Why should Canada be giving money to a brutal dictatorship when our deficit is at an all-time high?

Indonesia is also Canada's largest export market in Southeast Asia, with two-way trade expected to exceed \$1 billion this year, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs. The new Liberal government has indicated that Indonesia will be an increasingly important trading partner.

Trade, however, should benefit all Canadians. Increased trade with Asian economies, such as Indonesia, has not helped our communities.

Many Canadian companies are expanding their investments in Indonesia by leaps and bounds. This has the effect of exporting jobs from Canada to the low-wage Indonesian economy, where workers are lucky to earn \$2 a day. For example, Inco Ltd. is expanding its operations in Sulawesi, Indonesia, at the same time it lays off workers in Sudbury, Ont. and Thompson, Man.

The Portuguese Canadian community has always been concentrated in blue-collar, labour-intensive, low-skilled jobs. The recent economic recession hit the Portuguese communities in Canada especially hard. Portuguese Canadians suffered disproportionately high rates of unemployment. As we continue to close these kinds of blue-collar jobs and open Canadian companies in Indonesia and countries like it, we are exporting the very life-blood of our communities.

For the Portuguese Canadian communities, the East Timor situation represents a double tragedy. Not only is our tax money being used to encourage the export of jobs which have traditionally been our livelihood, but the same money is also subsidizing the continuing destruction of a kindred nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Canada should work multilaterally with countries like Portugal, Ireland and the Lusophone states to force Indonesia to allow self-determination for East Timor. If Indonesia continues to ignore UN resolutions, Canada should apply trade and aid sanctions.
2. Canada should use international forums, like the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings and the Consultative Group on Indonesia aid donor forum, as platforms to raise human rights concerns.
3. Canada should work for an international embargo on the sale of military equipment to Indonesia.
4. Canada should use its voice to work for the cultural survival of East Timorese peoples.
5. Canada should call for the unconditional release of Xanana Gusmão and all other East Timorese political prisoners.
6. Canada should offer concrete support to institutions in East Timor that are actually helping the people, such as the Catholic Church, International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF. No aid money should be given to agencies that are controlled or influenced by the Indonesian government.
7. Canada should work for the inclusion of representatives of the East Timorese people in UN-sponsored talks between Portugal and Indonesia.