

ref: UC 1 91
28 October 1991

URGENT COMMUNIQUÉ Nº 1 1991

SUBJECT: The suspension of the visit by the Portuguese parliamentary delegation to East Timor.

PORTUGAL SUSPENDS PPD VISIT

On 25 October, 10 days before the PPD departure scheduled for 4 November, Vitor Crespo, the Portuguese Parliamentary Chairman, officially announced: "the parliamentary visit to East Timor has been suspended for as long as the Indonesian veto on the nomination of Australian journalist Jill Jolliffe persists". The short official announcement (to which we have not as yet had access in its entirety) invoked a "question of principle" regarding the fundamental right to freedom of information and described this step as the culmination of a series of "difficulties and restrictions" which had been raised by the Indonesian government in the course of the negotiations.

João de Deus Pinheiro, Portuguese Foreign Minister, who had been present at the meeting in which the suspension was decided, said: "it is vital that the international community and above all the UN, should be fully aware of the whole story behind this process". To this end, Vitor Crespo stated that the parliament was writing a document which "makes explicit some of the multiple difficulties which have arisen all along the line, in practically every meeting"

The Parliamentary Chairman stressed that "we will continue to fight in the name of the people of Timor, for their right to self-determination" and Mr de Deus Pinheiro confirmed that Portugal will remain available to resume negotiations "in accord with the terms of reference". (Diário de Notícias and Público 27/10)

Nobody in Portugal has openly condemned the parliament's decision and the reaction can be divided into three broad groups:

those who support Portugal's stand and who think that the question of the visit should now be shelved, future efforts being channeled into a Portuguese diplomatic offensive and into the holding of an International Conference of Parliamentarians (Abílio Araújo of FRETILIN and Paulo Pires of the UDT);

those who support the Lisbon decision but think that the negotiations could be reopened should Indonesia lift the veto on Jill Jolliffe, while also favouring a diplomatic offensive (Angelo Correia, the PSD deputy designated Head of the PPD by Crespo);

those who support the decision in so far as it is seen as a direct result of a

continuous imposition of conditions on the part of Jakarta, but who also criticise the form in which Portugal conducted the negotiations, alleging excessive concessions (Sousa Lara, chair of the Parliamentary Standing Commission on East Timor) and the lack of a global strategy on the part of the administering power (Luisa T. Pereira, CDPM).

The weekly "Expresso", printed hours before the parliamentary decision, wrote: "in spite of the pretext for the cancellation of the visit being the refusal by Jakarta to accept the Australian journalist Jill Joliffe accompanying the Portuguese MPs, this resolution is consonant with the scepticism shown by both the President of the Republic [Mario Soares] and by Angelo Correia, the PSD deputy who was to head the delegation".

BACKGROUND

In this context, two events have had significant repercussions in Portugal in recent weeks: the leaking of parts of the report of the advance group on their return from Timor and the plea made by Bishop Belo on TSF radio (21/10): "don't come, don't come, unless an international force stays on after the deputies leave" The media gave more emphasis to the first part of the phrase and the second was forgotten. Then on the night of 24 October Bishop Belo told TSF "My opinion is that they should not come" (published O Jornal 25/10).

"Público" journalist Adelino Gomes posed a series of "still-unanswered questions" to the Portuguese authorities regarding the final days of negotiations, in which he appeared to be of the point of view that there were within the Portuguese side, sectors who did not want the visit to take place. He finished his piece saying "there is a small supplementary question which it is too tempting for us not to add, even at the risk of being demagogic: what is the place of the people of Timor, considering that Portugal decided to suspend the visit" (Público 27/10)

On the Indonesian side, a clear strategy could be distinguished in the talks that took place after the original terms of reference had been accepted in September. Successive restrictions resulted in:

the impossibility of tv teams transmitting images of the visit direct from Timor - they would have to pass first through Jakarta,

the plane carrying the delegation not being permitted to arrive in Dili but rather in the military airport in Baucau,

the PPD plane not being allowed to remain on Timorese territory and accessible during the visit nor would the Portuguese be permitted to bring a small plane which would permit them to make certain journeys using their own transport;

It will be recalled that all the logistical arrangements had been in the hands of the occupants. On 26 October "Público" reported a new restriction whereby the Indonesian side insisted that the PPD should travel in a "Garuda" (Indonesian airway) plane rather than the Thai plane which the Portuguese had hired for the visit.

The process of negotiation for the conduct of the visit was due to close on 21 October but on that day Indonesia raised problems relating to the acceptance of 3

of the 16 journalists nominated by Portugal (10 Portuguese and 6 from the international press): Rui Araujo (RTP), Mario Robalo (Expresso) and Jill Joliffe, an Australian free-lance journalist who has been resident in Portugal for some ten years. Portugal refused to change their nominations. After talks between Perez de Cuellar and Ali Alatas in Paris where they were both attending the signing of the Cambodia peace plan (23/10), the Indonesian foreign minister declared that Jakarta was not in a position to refuse the two Portuguese journalists but insisted that "we veto Jill Joliffe and it is within our rights to do so" (Público 26/10). Lisbon then gave until midday the following Saturday, 26/10, for Jakarta to change its position, which it did not do.

"Within Portuguese political and parliamentary circles there was meanwhile a belief that the veto on the journalist represented an imposition on the part of the hawkish wing of the Indonesian military interested in maintaining a hard-line policy on Timor" (Público 26/10). Mario Carrascalao, having been informed of the Portuguese decision said "The visit failed, let them arrange another form of resolving the problem, but one which does not follow a similar solution, because it has been seen that it was of no use". (TSF, 26/10)

Comment:

The PPD visit has represented a great risk for all the parties involved in the conflict. The negotiators (Indonesia and Portugal) had been working for years under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General until they reached the point of signing the terms of reference and the setting of dates, itineraries and logistics for the visit. As time passed both sides had been feeling mounting fears regarding the outcome of the visit. For the former there fears of the people expressing their will and for the latter there was anxiety about the scenario and traps being mounted by Jakarta.

The difference between Jakarta and Lisbon would appear to be that the former has a defined strategy, in spite of contradictions which exist between various internal social and political groupings, whereas the latter has never succeeded in formulating a common strategy held by the government and all the political forces within the country.

The people of Timor, who up to now have never been admitted to the negotiating table, have always been depending on the visit and have been preparing itself for years for it. In recent weeks there have been mounting reports of fierce repression by the occupying forces and appeals for the visit to take place, but that there should be an international peace-keeping force stationed in the territory to protect the population after the PPD had departed.

Editor and translator: Billy Williams
East Timor News is a service which publishes information in three forms - the Monthly Memo (MM) and the occasional publications, Subject Memo (SM) and Urgent Communique (UC). It can also make available, on request, copies of all documents mentioned in these publications. It is produced by two Portuguese NGOs, CDPM (The Commission for the Rights of the Maubere People) and 'Peace is possible in East Timor'. The annual subscription is 100\$US. The text in East Timor News may be freely quoted but in the event of the quotation of a significant portion of its contents, ETN should be credited.