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AUSTRALIAN INFORMATION SERVICE

Backgrounder

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TRANSCRIPT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE HONOURABLE E.G. MITLAW, AC, QC,
ON FRIDAY 5 MARCH 1982, AT THE CSIS BUILDING, JAKARTA, INDONESIA.

Mr. Mitlam: Ladies and Gentlemen, you have been told already that Peter Hastings and I have had the opportunity to visit East Timor. He has been there on several occasions previously. This was my first visit. Even therefore answering questions of yours concerning the situation as it can be seen today compared with the situation as it could be seen in earlier years I can only speak to you about what I saw on this occasion.

Our visit was particularly valuable owing to the good offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross. You had a press conference here yesterday I believe from the four members of the ICRC team at present in Indonesia. The leader, Mr David Delapraz, the Regional Director for South East Asia of the International Committee of the Red Cross stationed in Kuala Lumpur, Dr Armin Willi, a doctor who has worked in many areas for the Red Cross, Mademoiselle Romaine Tissieres, who was included in interpreter/translator for the team, and Mr Cedric Neukomm. Now, we met the four in Bali last Sunday and we had a prior briefing from them of the involvement of the International Red Cross in Indonesia in recent years. You know their activities, their traditional field activities over the last 100 years and more, and I imagine that you have all that information from a day ago from them. So you can see and have from them a description of what they have done, and also what Catholic Relief Services of the United States has done. They did not report of course, but on behalf of Catholic Relief Services of the United States they acknowledge the role that they have been able to play at crucial times in recent years in East Timor.

Then on the Monday Mr Hastings and I flew to Dili with Mr Neukomm and on Tuesday and Wednesday in an ICRC helicopter we were able to fly to mid points in East Timor and to fly over the whole lot. The only limitation on what we could see from the air was cloud, but we were able to see the terrain, the cultivation, the buildings, particularly the main structures, from the air in most places which we were not able to visit. The ones we were able to visit on the Tuesday were Ermera, Suai, Maliana, Atauro, and on the Wednesday Natarbora, Dilor, Los Palos, Luro and back to Dili via Baucau. Now, in each of those places we had quite some time meeting officials and seeing the population, the crops, the schools, hospitals, houses, community places, agricultural projects, fishing projects and communications. We were able to see structures, and we were also able to see hundreds of the population. Then yesterday we flew back to Jakarta and got here about 11.30 last night.

Now, in these opening remarks I think I can most usefully confine myself to what I saw, and to relate that to what in fact has been publicised about East Timor. Now, one of the things which has received most publicity in Australia during the last year was the story emanating from Msgr Martinho Da Costa Lopes, the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Dili, that he needed 250,000 Australian dollars (that's about 300,000 US dollars) for this year to avoid the consequences of a massive famine which could take out 100,000 of the population. I do not know how many of you correspondents have seen this report, accordingly I may be saying something with which you are thoroughly familiar, or I may be saying something with which none of you are familiar. But many of you will be aware of these reports that there is likely to be a famine. As I understand it the origin of these reports was a letter which the Msgr sent from Jakarta to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference when he was an observer at the regional meeting of the Indonesian Catholic Bishops Conference.

That letter was later given to Catholic Relief Services in Australia and to a certain extent publicised in the Australian media. I've got to say that the Administrator's letter was without basis in fact. It is surprising in fact that the Msgr sent this letter abroad. He had been told the facts before he sent it. He made no effort to correct the letter.

The situation is this. That in about the third quarter of last year the Regional Director of the ICRC, Mr Delapraz, was in Australia and negotiated with the Australian Government to make 1000 tonnes of corn with immediate delivery of 500 tonnes of corn to be available in East Timor as a buffer stock. The resident ICRC representative, Mr Neukomm, in one of his regular visits to East Timor, had called on the Msgr, I think in October, and had told him that the ICRC had secured for certain 500 tonnes of corn as buffer stock for the following year and was optimistic of securing 1000 tonnes. He did not tell the Msgr that it was coming from Australia but he told the Msgr that the promise was given. Armed with that information the Msgr went to the conference here and responded to a query from the Australian bishops in the way I have described. The Msgr was also in touch I think with the President of the Republic himself in November last.

One of the matters which in the two hour interview with the Msgr on Monday night that Mr Hastings and I were anxious to ascertain was his view of the situation now. In particular I pointed out to him that when I returned to Australia it is very likely that I would be asked about this imminent famine, on the basis of the contents of his letter. And I said that if the 1000 tonnes will not be enough to offset the effects of any drought or famine, then I should tell the Australian people. But if it were not needed, by the same token, I should also tell the Australian people. So I asked the Msgr with some care what was his assessment now and he used to me the very words "1000 tonnes will be enough". I cannot understand or explain how the Msgr came to send that misleading and cruel letter, or why in a word the Msgr perpetrated this wicked act. The Msgr has distressed hundreds of thousands of Australians who responded generously when the last news came out over 2 years ago about a famine in East Timor and the effect that that had on the health, now and for the future, of so many of the population. And one expects that humane, charitable people in Australia would have responded to his assessment. He perpetrated a wicked act, he misstated the situation. There was not a person we met, private or official, in East Timor who said that there was a famine now or that in any possible circumstances there would not be a situation which could not be cured by the buffer stock soon to be in situ there.

So the first thing I have to say to you is there is not a problem of famine in East Timor now. And the second thing I have to say about that is that with the contribution to the buffer stock provided by the Australian Government, the efficiency of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the cooperation of the Indonesian authorities to see that food is distributed through the province, there will not be a famine. The second thing I want to say to you concerns the health of the population. This is not a matter upon which I have the qualifications to be so dogmatic. But from the comments made in each of the places that we visited outside Dili, and of course in Dili itself, I would be assured that there are enough medicines to cope with any of the health problems which are still likely to arise. There are some areas of the province where malaria would be endemic. I would not know to what extent that can be overcome. It is a very difficult problem. Now, I am making no claims about the stocks of medicines on the basis of what people said to us, the nurses, and in a few cases the doctors who were there, in each of the towns, the villages, we visited. In each case we could see the health services, the medicines, etc. Now...

I would not think, I mean one could not see any marasmic children, or Biafran children as people were describing them 2 or more years ago, or Kampuchean children as people were describing it 3 years or 4 years ago. There did not appear to be people with the great health problems that could be seen at that time. I am not presuming to say what the situation has been in the past. All I can say is from what I could see or from what the Red Cross people, International and Indonesian, have seen in their visits, we were satisfied that the situation as regards health and disease was now in hand.

The next matter I would mention would be the question of security. As I have described to you we went by helicopter to many areas outside Dili and we flew over certainly the whole of the island, not following any particular pre-determined course. We were not avoiding any areas. Our course would be largely determined by cloud and particularly on the second day was overcast in some areas. And we in any case were quite close to the ground. In Vietnam, for instance, when I was travelling there 10 years or more ago by helicopter you would climb to 5000 ft, 1500 metres or so, above the airport before you went across country. You make certain that you were beyond the power of bullets. But in East Timor one doesn't have to do that. One can fly apparently with safety over any part of the country quite close to the ground.

The best estimate that we can possibly give of the number of armed Fretilin would be 100 or at the most 130 people and they would be in some of the mountains in the eastern-most part of the province around Los Palos. Now, there would seem to be no apprehension of inroads being made and there seemed to be no fear of moving around or getting together in any of these areas. From some of the accounts one would think that Dili itself is an armed camp but it is not. It could be seen that people can go about normal affairs in East Timor in safety.

The next thing I would come to is the buildings, the structures that one sees. One can see immediately wherever one goes school buildings. New schools, rehabilitated schools, extended schools (indistinct). There are also very often Government buildings, meeting places, there are extensions of asphalt roads leading out from Dili to the east. To the south-west one can see the construction machines working on the roads. We could not land at every village but just from the corrugated iron roofs you could see these were of recent construction. I would think anybody visiting the area could see that there has been a great deal of construction in the last 4 years. Now, it is not just Dili. At Maliana, for instance, there was an irrigation system installed in the last couple of years I think. It is of course being used to increase production of corn and rice. (indistinct) I think 2500 cows from Australia during the last year or so.

So there has been, apart from the things that one expects in a community like education and health and communications, meeting places, a considerable effort made to augment and improve the diet of the people. These are the things that I could raise with you as what I saw. I would think that anybody would notice the same things. Now, if there are any questions that any of you want to ask me I will be happy to try to answer them. It would help me to know what your names are when you first ask me a question and what papers you represent.

Q.

(indistinct) You say that you had a 2 hour interview with the Apostolic Administrator of Dili, during which you presumably made your points and

presumably you described to him what you had seen and heard and yet you tell us that you cannot understand what brought him to write a "wicked and cruel" letter. And yet the only quote you give us from him during the course of your 2 hour interview was that presumably 1000 tonnes was enough. Could you tell us what his response was and some more about what he told you in the face of your questions to him.

A. We met him on the Monday night as I told you before. I confirmed that before he wrote the letter he knew of the arrangements which had been made by the Red Cross with the Australian Government and the Indonesian Government. I confirmed with him that he had received that information from the Red Cross delegate before he went to Jakarta. I confirmed that in Jakarta he had seen the bishops and the President, I got his confirmation that 1000 tonnes will be enough. When you ask which villages he could point out as those likely to be or already stricken by famine he did not know.

Q. What did he tell you then?

A. (answer indistinct)

Q. You refer to Australian press reports on East Timor in the Australian newspapers but I understand, possibly wrongly, that either in his letter or a similar report which has been circulated widely outside there is the allegation that an upcoming famine will not be due solely or even primarily to drought but to the fact that large numbers of civilians, according to these reports, were dragged by the Indonesian forces into taking part in large scale military operations against Fretilin and thereby were forced to abandon their agricultural activities during the battle period. Now, do you have any comments on that?

A. As I understand it, many crops were planted after the operations to which you are referring.

Q. Why was such an operation necessary if, as you say, there are only 150 Fretilin left?

A. I am only giving you the biggest assessment which we were able to get. 100 or, at the most, 130 armed Fretilin. I have also described where one went and how one went. Nobody has any apprehensions that there would be attacks by Fretilin on people so doing.

Q. (indistinct)

A. I asked the Bishop about comments that he made about killings at Lacluta. He said he has not any proof and he was unable to give us anymore information. You remember he made statements about it in what he described as a homily in the Pro-Cathedral in Dili in which he made certain accusations. But he could not give any information other than the allegations made in the homily so I cannot give you any information from the Bishop other than what he had already said to me and he was not able to give us the sources of his information.

Q. In what capacity are you visiting Timor? How would the findings of your visit be used when you get back to Australia?

A. I had the opportunity to come here, I was viewed as an elder statesman and I took the opportunity. I was told that if I got myself to Indonesia

- Q. With respect, there seems to be some inconsistency here. You quote figures saying you were informed, and by implication you believe, there were only 100 to 130 armed Fretilin in the mountains. By implication presumably you would not quote these figures if you did not believe them and yet you say that you believe some people may have been killed in crossfire between Fretilin soldiers and Indonesian soldiers. We heard yesterday from the International Red Cross that some 4000 people were being transported to a small island in the South China Sea for security purposes (I do not know whether you asked about this). Thirdly, we have not discussed what appears on paper to have been a fairly large scale military operation involving civilians. So you see there is an inconsistency there between 100 to 130 armed guerillas hiding in the mountains and the scale of the military operations and movement of people who appear to have been involved.
- A. You probably got yesterday, I have not seen the transcript of the press conference, from the ICRC the figures about the number of people on Atauro. The numbers that I noted down were 3747 persons in 806 families and they were moved very fast at short notice, some at an hour's notice, to Atauro. They are free to move about on the island. Some have already returned home. The number I had was 157 have gone back to Los Palos and 128 to Baucau. I also am told that it is expected that most of those will go back to their places of residence by June this year. We went through as many of the huts as we wanted to see at Atauro, we saw the families. The Red Cross, in accordance with its practice and skills developed over 100 years now, was able in the course of the last fortnight to list them all, names, residences, religion. The objective I gather of taking people from the villages there, is to break the link between people in the foothills or the mountains and the people in the villages. If these people in this extraordinary broken terrain of Timor can't get supplies from the villages, then they just have to come in. They have got to surrender and that is the objective of moving this quite large number of people to Atauro. But the Red Cross would have told you I guess what has been done about them to supply them with medicine and foodstuffs. I have made notes myself.
- Q. The implication of what you have just said is that these 4000 people were assisting Fretilin and therefore the implication is that they supported them.
- A. No, there was no such implication. In all rationale there is no implication that they support it. Some might have. There is no implication that most did. I mean, if armed men come upon you they can very often (tape interrupted). We also visited the Comarca, the prison in Dili itself. We saw people who had been convicted by the courts there, and the other people had been detained presumably on security grounds. We saw all the people of whom the Red Cross had informed us. We were able to see the people and see the accommodation in the prison there. As I understand it, the Red Cross is quite satisfied that it has been able to trace all these people detained in the prison in Dili and relegated to the off-shore island of Atauro. If the Red Cross was not satisfied that it had been able to trace all these people it would have discontinued its operations.
- Q. (Indistinct)
- A. People did not come up and make complaints to us, nor did we go up to people and try to elicit any complaints. I have described what we saw. Now, there can be no question as to the physical appearance of the thousands of people we saw. There can be no doubt about the appearance of the villages which we saw, and Dili which we walked around quite extensively.

it was likely that the Red Cross would make it possible for me to go around the province by helicopter. So I got myself to Indonesia and the Red Cross got around in the helicopter.

Q. Are you going to write an article, or are you going to appear before the Senate Committee, or are you writing a book?

A. It is quite possible that one or other journal in Australia will ask me to write an article. I probably would accept the invitation. There will be a Senate Committee meeting to consider this matter. I have not been invited to appear before it. If I was invited I would seriously consider the invitation.

Q. I wonder if you found amongst the people in East Timor as distinct from the Bishop any internalised sense of disenchantment with the situation in East Timor today, particularly in the field of corruption.

A. I was not in a position to make any investigations into corruption, no allegations of that character I think have seen much publicity in Australia. I pursued matters which have really been the subject of publicity in Australia about East Timor in recent months. I do not recall allegations of this character in respect of East Timor. I am wanting to limit myself to what I saw, the opportunities I had to see things and meet people, and to what my conclusions were from seeing these places and people. Anybody we asked to see we were able to see, including people who it is alleged had been detained. We had a couple of talks with other priests, one of them we had a couple of hours with. So our time was quite fully spent in seeing people. I have not brought with me the newspaper cuttings on Timor because I came at rather short notice, and there has been a considerable amount in recent months in Australia. I saw some before I left. There was a document produced by Paul Condon. It is produced in London. I am not sure what the name of the organisation is, but I was obviously hoping to see Msgr Martinho Da Costa Lopes because this document refers to the statement by him. The authoritative statement is solely from the Msgr. The danger of famine, the killing of 500 Timorese the previous summer during a siege at the Shrine of St Anthony of Lacluta. So meeting the Msgr I asked him about all those events. And I have told you the extent of which he was able to assist in elucidating these reports of which he is the source.

Q. On these reports did you receive any denial from any official, either Timorese or Indonesian, which you met?

A. I certainly made quite a number of enquiries about it. I believe that during the operations in that area there were some people killed. The number of 500 is quite frankly absurd. Nobody would think that was possible, but I would think it was possible that some Indonesian soldiers, including Timorese soldiers, came upon some Fretilin soldiers with their guns and that there were some deaths resultant from the crossfire. That is what I would think is right. I can give you nobody who could give a precise account of what might have happened. The mischief which flows from a statement such as the Bishop made in his homily about 500 being killed is considerable. Distress was caused by the exaggeration and the possibility of there being any truth in it. I think there may have been some truth. I think there may have been people killed in crossfire there. But 500 is by everybody's assessment so absurd that people may be inclined to discount the fact that there was any shooting or firing at all. I think there probably was, the extent I do not know. But 500 is absurd, <http://timorarchives.wordpress.com>

There can be no doubt as to what we were told about the stocks of food and medicines. I was not wanting to be a sleuth into other things. I am describing what and whom we saw, and the conditions of the structures and the land and the people that we saw.

Q. (Indistinct)

A. The emergency, the massive operations which the ICRC and the US Catholic Relief Services did no longer apply. They admit that they no longer apply. But the advice that these bodies can give is still of great value and let me just say what the Catholic Relief Services are doing. They are pursuing development assistance there. Yesterday, for instance, I saw the tractors which they had acquired to enable the farming people in the province to be more productive. But, as I understand it, the operation of the ICRC may end in June. They have 6 month engagements with the Indonesian Government and after the middle of this year UNICEF will be there. So I think one can distinguish between the massive relief operations which Catholic Relief Services from the US have carried out in barges around the coast a couple of years ago, and those which the ICRC carried out inland in the villages where the situation was most critical. We were told, and I guess you were told yesterday, the number of villages concerned. You will note from the names and places we visited, that we visited some of those villages. So the massive operations which were certainly needed had succeeded. Their continuing advice is valuable in the fact that there is a system for (indistinct) in the International Committee for the Red Cross and the Indonesian Red Cross in matters like health is obvious and has been available when necessary up to this time. But it is not a massive operation which is now required. The fact that a massive operation was once required does not imply that the people who carried it out must still carry it out. There are other skills which they can make available still. This is a province of Indonesia which is now, per head, receiving the greatest boost in development.

Q.

In the same context of what is now needed, was the 1000 tonnes of wheat needed in your assessment?

A.

In some circumstances which occur not infrequently in Timor, yes. It is a buffer stock. Timor has an ecology and climatic history which makes it prudent to have buffer stock. It is not a very productive area but knowing that history, knowing the precarious condition of the economy and the production pattern there, it is obviously prudent to have a buffer stock. The ICRC saw that, it put the case to the Australian Government which saw it. The Indonesian Government was cooperating with the ICRC and the Australian Government and the buffer stock was agreed. The fact that you have a buffer stock available does not in any way show there is famine now or that there is risk of famine. What it does show is that even if there is a failure in production there will not be a famine.

Q.

All along the presentation of the facts that you have been giving just now you have been very careful to state that you can only speak for what you saw, for what you witnessed and what you were told. And yet in a couple of instances you have made what I would consider the definitive comment to the effect that the Msgr is a liar or a maniac or worse. You infer that it is totally unreasonable to assume that 500 people were killed at the monument that the Msgr refers to despite the fact that you say you cannot get anyone to give you a figure. You said definitively without quoting anyone you said definitively it is unreasonable for 500 people to have died. On what do you base these conclusions if you said you can only speak for what you personally saw in East Timor.

A. The person who made the allegations of 500, the Msgr, was met, was interrogated. He could not substantiate the figure. He said he had never been there, he said there was no priest there. He could quote no more. This did not surprise me, I suppose I would have to confess, because I had already learnt that the villages which he had previously quoted as being in the grip of famine obviously were not. So it is possible that the Msgr believed that his findings can be best discharged by exaggeration of wars. Now, 500 people getting killed in any spot in that terrain is a very large enterprise, and nobody else is prepared to suggest that 500 people were killed there. Now, why should we assume there were 500 in what would be a very difficult area to muster the number of people who would produce in any circumstances 500 fatalities. Why should we assume it if the person who makes the allegations cannot justify it. In other cases when he has made allegations one finds that there is no basis for those allegations. So if one asserts it was 500 surely the person who is the origin of this story should do something to justify it. Nobody has been prepared to do so. There is no proof of it, for instance there is no monument there.

Q. Isn't it also quite reasonable that neither can one assume that 500 people were not killed and state it definitively on the basis of the fact that the accuser wasn't able to prove definitively that 500 people were killed? You have said definitively that 500 people were not killed.

A. Everybody else we mentioned it to, and there was a considerable number, thought that the allegation was absurd. If you saw this general terrain you would surely believe that it would be a very large battle to produce 500 fatalities. This would be a very large conflict. In recent years how many military engagements have there been in the world which produce 500 fatalities? Let's be sensible about this.

Q. Did you speak to the Msgr after your visit to the province?

A. No.

Q. So it was impossible to go back to him with questions about his reports based on what you had seen.

A. There was no need to. He confirmed the fact that before he came to Jakarta he made it public. He had been told by the Red Cross delegate while in Dili that there would be 500 and hopefully 1000 tonnes of corn available. He confirmed that he got this letter in Jakarta while observing the Indonesian episcopal conference, that he had the letter from the Australian episcopal conference. He confirmed that he had seen the President and he agreed that 1000 tonnes of corn will be enough. Now, are you suggesting that I go back after he had admitted all those things and ask him if he still admitted them? And I asked him about Lacluta and also of course which villages were stricken with famine and he could not cite them. I asked him about Lacluta, and he could not quote any source or the nature of any source. He had not been there.

Q. Did you ask him in the light of the seriousness of the allegations, and the publicity they have received that if none of his accusations seemed to pan out in your opinion you may have checked back to him. I was just asking you if you did find out if there was some explanation of the fact.

I would like to shift if possible to Peter Hastings and ask him if he believes that the Msgr was as completely off, deliberately or otherwise, in his assessment of the situation in East Timor as the allegations would seem to imply.

A. (Mr Peter Hastings)

I attended the interview right through and I noticed several things. One was a statement that hundreds had died through ill-treatment on Atauro. Now, there was a certain core of truth. Hundreds had died last year from a form of gastro-enteritis, caused primarily by malnutrition obtained in areas from which they had come which inevitably lowered resistance. I think the Red Cross doctor, Dr Willi, certified this. That is a very different situation from the one we described. Now, on Lacluta, we did get one quite free assessment from an Indonesian source that in that exchange 80 people died. There was a surprise attack on a Fretilin group, families and supporters by a company of Hansip. There was an exchange of small arms and rifles in which 80 might have died, 60 to 80, and several women who had also been there of course as part of the family. So I am only quoting what I have been told. Most people we asked about that particular incident thought that the Bishop was exaggerating and one of his own priests, not to be named, not engaged and properly so in the altercation over his own Bishop for whom he had an affection, nevertheless thought of him as a man who exaggerated, who was by the nature of his breeding, upbringing and his education totally nostalgic for Portugal, and so with the disappearance of the Portuguese, the abolition of his own language, culture, social values he felt the need like many of them do to (indistinct). I hesitate to ascribe (indistinct) to him but I suspect because when he first wrote (indistinct). By the same token I am not saying he was not concerned for his flock, but it was said over and over again by many people, and it is on record by European observers, not just Indonesian observers, that he was not very diligent about the facts which he mentioned.

Q. A lot of the seriousness of the whole situation and the allegations that have been made it seems to me that we may be able to get from either of you two gentlemen more about your two hour conversation with the Msgr because as Mr Griffiths pointed out originally, we still have very little to substantiate anything except that the Msgr quoted you 1000 tonnes would be enough. And I just personally am finding it incredibly difficult to come to terms with the apparent ill-motives of this Msgr.

A. (Mr Whitlam)

There are other people that you can ask about this. I presume at the press conference with the ICRC yesterday you asked about the buffer stock. I presume you asked them about that, and I presume that they would have told you when the arrangements were made and they would have told you that in their view the buffer stock was enough to meet contingencies. I presume that that is the case. You could also ask Catholic Relief Services, which is under the US Catholic Conference, and ask them what they think about the prospect of famine in Timor. There are two other organisations that have been here for 2 or 3 years. The ICRC and the Catholic Relief Services - ask them what they think about the prospect of famine. Ask them whether they still confirm in any respect what the Msgr said. As I understand it the villages which the Msgr has cited are in fact not subject to famine. Furthermore, the buffer stock is believed to be adequate to meet contingencies. Now, I have told you what the Msgr told us and I believe that what he said is not well balanced. I have not used any of the terms that Mr Manguno has asked me presumably to endorse. I do not respond to his use of any of those words. I have used words, and I will stick by them, but we are not the only persons on whom you have to rely for an assessment of the prospects of famine. There are priests from Dili who go through Jakarta from time to time. Some of them are on Portuguese passports and go for leave to Goa, to Portugal or maybe Macau. You could ask them. The fact is, I believe that you

cannot find famine anywhere to support the Administrator's outburst to the Australian bishops last November. You can check up presumably with Indonesian bishops and find what their assessment is. You can check up with priests in East Timor. You mention motives. This has clearly worried me. Why is it that all the negative stories which one reads about East Timor and the Indonesian Government or Army or whatever it is in respect to East Timor, they are all likely to be attributed to church sources. Now, this is happening so constantly that I am driven to a conclusion that most of these stories do in fact come from priests in East Timor and higher. It worries me why this should be the case and I am not unaware of the fact that many people will take umbrage at the fact that I, a separated brother, may be doubting what a person holding office for many years in the Catholic Church may have said. Now, there may be - there are - in Australia, different views among Catholics on this report of famine. There are maybe differences of view between Catholic Relief Services in the United States, which has been very active and effective in Timor, and Catholic Relief Services in Australia, which is a component of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

I believe the explanations Mr Hastings has given about the remaining Portuguese influence in East Timor is correct. A great number of the clergy were educated in a Portuguese land. They were the heirs to a full range of Portuguese culture. In such a situation there is a crisis of identity for such persons and it is a matter of complexity and distress I assume to the Msgr and to many of the priests. I would think that from now on the populace in their schools and the worshippers in their churches will find decreasing value and roles for the Portuguese language and the Portuguese tradition. Now, one does not have to disparage the Portuguese language or traditions to say that. All one is saying is that all other aspects of that language and tradition in the form of men and women on the ground have departed. The church remains, but I think it also should be pointed out that the Indonesian Government has taken as far as I can see no steps whatever to suppress the Portuguese view. Indonesia is the most populous Islamic country in the world. At the same time there is no Islamic nation that is more tolerant of other religions. There are more Catholics for instance in Indonesia than there are in Australia, and Timor Timur is one, not the only one, of the Indonesian provinces which has a majority of Christians. There is only the smallest handful of Muslims in East Timor. There are various conclusions as to the number of Catholics there. According to the figures the Bishop gave, the Catholics there have prospered since liberation. There would be more than almost half the population, according to the Bishop, that are now Catholics. And the Indonesian Government has done nothing to limit the observance of the Catholic religion or the proselytisation by priests and catechists. We met several priests and a catechist. We saw several churches. We saw some dispensaries and so on conducted by the Catholic Church. In Dili itself, where there are new street signs throughout the town, there are, as far as I can see, the Portuguese names still there in front of the old headquarters. There is the monument erected in 1960 for the 5th centenary of the death of Henry the Navigator, and one of the neighbouring streets still bears the name Jalan Infante Don Enrico. There is another street there, Jalan Martyres da Patria, Martyrs of the Fatherland. Throughout the town and up on the roads into the hills one can see various jalans, jalan-jalan, with a Portuguese name after it. So, as I understand it, Indonesia, somewhat exceptionally for a community which states religious principles among the founding and basic principles of the community, is tolerant to faiths other than Islam. You can see it in Dili, and you can see it in these villages of Indonesia. I would think there is a church we saw and usually visited in every one of the places I have mentioned. And certainly the Pro-Cathedral is a large place, and another one, on the road to (indistinct), the Immaculate Conception Church.

And in each case we spoke to the priest. So it would be quite wrong to suggest that all the clergy in East Timor are prone to exaggeration. But some are, and worry about this fact. What I have said I think is a feasible and generous explanation.

Q.

I have understood from some people that the Indonesian Government was not intending to build up buffer stocks. You said that the buffer stock will be supplied. If there has been any difference, has it been reconciled about building up the buffer stock of corn?

A.

Well, I do not know of any differences there. All I can say is what the Red Cross has told me, what the Msgr has agreed that the Red Cross told him and what the Australian Foreign Minister announced. Also I saw the storehouses in Dili which were said to be available for it, and there is one very large new storehouse there and there are a couple next to it which looked in very good condition. It is in a relatively new part of the town on the way to the original airport, which is now the helicopter airport.

Q.

You are not aware of any movement against stockpiling the buffer stock?

A.

I'm not aware of it. The Australian Foreign Minister made a statement about this some time ago. I forget the exact date. I remember that there was some suggestion or fear that this announcement might be thought to be a reaction to the Bishop's letter which had received publicity in Australia. Now, I will have to check to see if I am correct there. I just mention it to you so you can check up yourself. But the arrangements were made by Mr Delapraz and the Foreign Affairs Department in Canberra months ago. I forget exactly what month it was but you probably were told this yesterday. As I understand it Mr Delapraz was in Melbourne as far back as 20 June last year. As I understand it, on 20 June 1981 (this is the note I took, I will be looking at the transcription of yesterday's conference and I do not know if this was mentioned there), on 20 June last year Mr Delapraz in Melbourne got the undertaking of 500 and then later, maybe as late as October, the delegate in East Timor thought that it would be prudent to increase that to 1000. And the Australian Government did that. I am not a supporter of the Australian Government (well, I won't criticise the Government of my country if I can avoid it when I am outside the country), but on the issue of East Timor I do not find anything to criticise on what the Australian Foreign Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs have done. What we have said and what we have done in East Timor has my support.

Q.

You say you are an elder statesman. Could you please tell us why you came to Timor and why at this particular time and also who you saw today.

A.

Describing myself as an elder statesman is partly... as a matter of fact I was hoping for good humour in the circumstances, I don't think we always have to be lugubrious on these occasions. I hope I have not upset anybody by assuming that factual description. I would hope that any Australian who had been interested in public affairs, as I have been, or who has had a long experience on reporting them, particularly in our region as Mr Hastings has had for a quarter of a century, if any such person got the opportunity to visit East Timor that he take the opportunity. That is what I did. Now, there has been a very great deal said about East Timor in the Australian media. If I had the opportunity to go and see for myself, I thought, well, I will take the 8 days off required to do it and that is what I have done.

Q. Were you invited by CSIS to do this?

A. I did not speak to them directly, and I knew they were making arrangements. I did not speak to the Red Cross directly but when I got here I met them. So I don't know how all the arrangements were made. I was led to believe that if I got myself to Indonesia from Australia that there would probably be the opportunity for me to go around East Timor by helicopter so I got myself from Australia to here. I got the plane from Darwin to Jakarta.

You asked me whom I saw today. At 7.30 I had breakfast at the Mandarin Hotel with Mr Yusuf Wanandi and Mr Hari Tjan. At 9.00 I met General Panggabean and at 10.30 I met the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio. At lunch I was the guest of Mr Soedarmono, the Secretary-General of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Now I am meeting the lady and gentlemen of the international press. Tonight I am being received by the President. So those are the people I met today and will be meeting today.

Q. What did the Pro-Nuncio have to say about the Vatican representative's report?

A. What he told me I will not disclose.

Q. Can you tell us whether or not he was aware of the Apostolic Administrator's letter?

A. The Australian Ambassador and I were received by the Pro-Nuncio. I think we had 1 1/2 hours with him, at least an hour, but I am not going to indicate the subjects that either of us raised or the response that either of us got. I won't, for instance, when I meet the President, will I? Or Mr Panggabean. If I have private conversations, the results of them appear in due course in comments I make myself, but I will not individualise the sources.

Q. It seems to me that Mr Whitlam is somewhat willing to tell us what the Apostolic Administrator in Dili said. I thought perhaps you might be willing to tell us what the response from the Papal Nuncio in Jakarta was.

A. No I am not. There is no mystery about that. I do not believe that anybody, having been received by a diplomat or a representative of another state, the Vatican State, or the head of state in a country will disclose the subjects discussed. I am not in any way embarrassed on the question but I am certain that nobody who is in the position of having such opportunities will detail the conversation.

Q. Can you tell me if the visit is at your instigation or the instigation of the Indonesian Government?

A. Well, the only Indonesian I spoke to in the whole time was Mr Purnomo of the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra, and I spoke to him twice. I think once was about 3 or 4 weeks ago and another time I think was Wednesday of last week.

Q. Did he then convey the invitation to you or did you go to see him on your instigation to be invited?

A. No. I do not think that Mr Purnomo and I have met. We might have, but these were telephone conversations. I think he in Canberra and I in Sydney. So that is the situation.

Q. Who extended the invitation to you to make this trip?

A. The message was relayed to me that if I got here I would in all probability be able to go to East Timor and that the ICRC helicopter would take me around.

Q. If your report of what you have seen in Timor is published in Australia then what segment of the truth which is a negative opinion of Indonesia on the Timor issue will be influenced? Is there any proof which would change their minds?

A. I do not think that it is ever a disadvantage to learn the facts about any situation. I have had the opportunity. I wish more Australians had the opportunity, but I was one that did have the opportunity presented to him and took the opportunity, of seeing the country and I have limited myself to what I have seen and whom I have seen.