

412 George St.,
Fitzroy,
Victoria. 3065.
March 25, 1982.

The Editor,
The Bulletin.

Dear Sir,

The advocacy skills of a lawyer are used cleverly, but obviously, by Mr. Whitlam in defence of his chosen client Indonesia and its actions in East Timor.

In 'The Truth About East Timor', (The Bulletin 30.3.82), Mr. Whitlam continues ^{to ignore} the central issue of whether the East Timorese, like almost all other colonised peoples, have a right to self determination and the extent of their suffering over the past six years.

Mr. Whitlam and Mr. Hastings seem to have exaggerated warnings of a possible famine as a result of conscription that prevented planting of crops in November, into a report that famine exists now and then discovered triumphantly that there is no famine in the areas the Indonesians took them to. Mr. Whitlam berates and insults Monsignor Lopes whose warnings in October produced the food that may now avert famine.

Mr. Whitlam sets up another straw man and then demolishes it in saying that people who are concerned about food shortages in East Timor are ignoring Red Cross reports. I have read and I accept the Red Cross reports but they are limited to the areas in which Red Cross has been able to work. Although many East Timorese have been forcibly resettled, including the 4,000 on the island of Atauro that Mr. Whitlam and Mr. Hastings seemed so unconcerned about, most people live in subsistence economies in remote hamlets often beyond Indonesians Government and Red Cross administration. Red Cross reporting cannot cover these regions, nor does it purport to do so.

Australian Red Cross Society's withdrawal from the Australian Council for Overseas Aid and from the Australian Council of Social Service was because Red Cross must remain outside any kind of political activity if it is to minister to political prisoners and sustain the Geneva Conventions. It was not, as Mr. Whitlam implies, a criticism of other organisations who in some circumstances feel obliged to take up issues of injustice and human rights, especially when those issues are ignored by people like Mr. Whitlam.

Why didn't Mr. Whitlam find out why 400 parents and children are still denied reunion four years after the agreement between the Australian and Indonesian Governments, why it was necessary to conscript all the East Timorese men to help the Army, why the Indonesian newspaper Kompas reported a likely 30% shortfall in East Timorese food production, what the East Timorese really think of Indonesian rule and their views about self determination?

Yours faithfully,

Clare West