

THE AUSTRALIAN

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Helping neighbors in dire need

AUSTRALIA has a clear and urgent task to perform in Timor: to give immediate aid in the form of food, clothing, medical supplies and whatever else is needed by those many unfortunate Timorese who, according to reports, are hungry and destitute. This assistance must be given quickly, with no strings attached and no debate. They are our neighbors and they are in need. That is all we need to know at this stage.

Australia's role — or lack of one — in the takeover of Portuguese Timor by Indonesia has been less than admirable. Successive governments, both Labor and Liberal-National Country Party, have stood aside from the problems and the fighting associated with the takeover — a course of action forced on them by the practicalities of regional politics but no more palatable for that. Now we can do something for the people themselves.

We will help families to be reunited and that is good. But there is more. Our story today says that the Federal Government "is also willing to consider sympathetically any request for aid from the Indonesian Government but so far no formal request has been made." Do we have to wait to be asked?

The Indonesian Government has consistently refused to allow the International Red Cross to go into Timor, claiming it can handle the situation by itself. It is apparent that it cannot. It inherited a problem of need which the fighting has made worse. Australia should demand, politely but firmly, to be allowed to send relief teams and supplies. It would be surprising if any nation, including Indonesia, regarded with anything but approval a desire to help neighbors in need.