Interview with priest accused of sexually abusing children in Timor-Leste

By Tempo Timor  February 26, 2019  Tetum tuir mai

‘I never deny. I never confirm. I just say: no comment’

By Tjitske Lingsma

Tempo Timor travelled to the hamlet of Kutet in Timor-Leste’s enclave Oecusse to interview defrocked priest Richard Daschbach, who is accused of sexually abusing minors. When asked whether he had touched children, Daschbach replied: ‘That’s my business, not yours.’
Daschbach (now 82 years old) agrees to talk to Tempo Timor. Just before the interview starts he takes a piece of betel nut. While he chews the stimulant drug, which gives a sense of alertness and well-being, red residue fills his mouth. Daschbach - wearing long blue trousers, a brown-grey-white polo-shirt and grey plastic Crocs - sits in a blue plastic chair in his one-room house which has books, little stuff, a stove, plastic cupboards and a big bed covered with a mosquito net. From behind his spectacles his blue eyes look straight at the interviewer.

Daschbach, who was born in the USA, came to West-Timor in 1966 as a parochial priest and settled in the mountains near Kefamenanu. After the Portuguese colonisers left Timor-Leste, he went to Oecusse. But it wouldn’t be until 1990 before he permanently settled in Kutet. ‘There is a special power that draws you to it,’ he says, adding: ‘There is a special appeal. The mountains. The people.’ He had permission from his congregation Societas Verbi Divini (SVD, Society of the Divine Word) to create a retreat-house. But things would turn out differently. As always there were many children around and Daschbach decided to set up Topu Honis shelter home. ‘It started organically, as children just came,’ he tells Tempo Timor.

Topu Honis has two locations. Young children stay in Kutet, while the teenagers are in the coastal village of Mahata. According to the organisation’s website, Topu Honis is ‘a safe haven’ for orphans, poor children, disabled adults and women fleeing abuse. It provides health care, food, schooling, ‘shelter and safety’, sponsorships for education and employment opportunities. Over the years ‘hundreds and hundreds’ of children stayed in Topu Honis, Daschbach explains. He can’t give exact numbers as the shelter did not keep statistics. The organisation received substantial amounts of money from – foreign - donors. (In February 2018, for instance, the shelter received more than 100.000 US dollars.)

During the UN sponsored referendum in 1999, when the Timorese overwhelmingly voted for independence from Indonesia which had brutally occupied the country for 24 years, Topu Honis protected many refugees who were fleeing brutal attacks by militia and Indonesian military. Until they all had to leave the shelter fleeing further into the mountains to save their lives. Topu Honis was burned down. Daschbach was praised for his efforts to save refugees. The shelter was rebuilt some 200 meters further up the hill. Timor-Leste’s Taur Matan Ruak, who was Falintil commander leader, army chief, president and is now prime minister, came ‘several times’ to pay his respect to the priest. Daschbach remembers that two boys who had lived in Kutet became Matan Ruak’s bodyguards.

But then in February 2018 the SVD received allegations that Daschbach had sexually abused young children living in Kutet. The congregation’s head in Rome ordered Fr. Yohanes Suban Gapun, SVD’s regional superior in Timor-Leste, to go to Oecusse and take Daschbach to Dili. While the congregation investigated the case, the priest was suspended and forbidden to perform priestly celebrations. However, during the interview with Tempo Timor, Daschbach holds on to another version, insisting that he was in SVD’s regional headquarters in Dili because he hadn’t had a proper break for decades. ‘I stayed there for six months as a vacation,’ he says.
When asked about the investigations by his congregation into allegations of sexual abuse, he says: ‘I don’t know anything about that.’ He also claims to have no memory of being taken to the national police to be heard by officers, despite the photos which were taken during one of these meetings. ‘I don’t remember that. I was too busy with other things,’ he says.

During the interview Daschbach also chooses to discredit the generous Australian donor Tony Hamilton, who had told Tempo Timor that the former priest had confessed to him that he had been a paedophile all his life. ‘That’s the thing with talking to Tony. He drinks so much wine. He is a little tipsy sometimes,’ smiles Daschbach, suggesting that Hamilton and another donor who was present ‘misinterpreted what I said.’

Then in August 2018, without authorisation from his superiors, Daschbach left SVD premises in Dili to return to Kutet and to live in his current house near Topu Honis. ‘I had decided in the beginning that I would be there (in Dili, TT) six months,’ he says. ‘It was time to leave and go back.’

Daschbach also decided to formally resign from his congregation and suggests he withdrew because of a conflict with SVD. ‘They wanted their hands on Topu Honis,’ he tells Tempo Timor. ‘So I wrote a letter resigning from the SVD. So now they have no formal legal foothold in Topu Honis anymore, because I am no longer their member.’ The break-up didn’t affect him much. ‘It was a small thing for me,’ he says.

Then in November the Vatican decided to laicise the priest removing him from the status of being a member of the clergy because Daschbach had sexually abused children. About that decision Daschbach reacts with a general remark: ‘Rules are rules. People are people.’ When asked by Tempo Timor to explain his words, he responds: ‘Rules are not people. People are not rules. I can’t go any deeper than that.’

The Vatican defrocked Daschbach and the rights of a priest were taken away from him. But Daschbach himself sees that differently. ‘Maybe. Nothing is clear,’ he says. However, that statements is in contradictions with the fact that Daschbach himself signed the Vatican’s documents stating he has been laicized. ‘I never read documents. I just sign them,’ responds Daschbach.

Daschbach insists he is not aware about the allegations that he sexually abused children. ‘No. Of course not. If I was aware of it, I would not be here,’ he responds without further elaborating. ‘Just no comment,’ is his answer to follow-up questions. This has also been his strategy with respect to previous allegations ‘that I sleep around with local women.’ He decided to pay no attention. ‘You have to be thick skinned when you hear rumours.’ His reaction has always been: ‘I never deny, I never confirm, just no comment.’

But when Tempo Timor asks him whether he never touched children, he reacts irritated: ‘That’s my business, not yours.’ Then Daschbach gets up from his chair and finishes the interview: ‘We quit right now. That’s enough.’
"Ha’u nunka nega. Ha’u nunka konfirma. Ha’u so hateten de’it katak, ha'ulaiha komen tariu"

By Tempo Timor March 08, 2019

Hosi Tjitske Lingsma

Tempo Timor hala'o viajen ba suku Kutet iha Rejiaun Administrativa Espesiál Oecusse Ambeno (RAEOA), hodi entrevista ho eis amu-lulik Richard Daschbach, ne’ebé hetan akuzasaun hodi halo abuzu seksuál ba labarik minoridade. Wainhira husu, karik nia hala'o abuzu ba labarik sira, Daschbach hatan katak “ne’e la'os ita boot nia preokupasaun, maibè ha’u nian.”

Dal an ba Suku Kutet tenki hakur mota, sa'e foho, tahu ne’ebé namdoras, no estrada kuak barak. Liu oras ida kareta boot ne’e, sa’e ba iha foho ne’ebé ho fatuk barak, molok to'o ba iha fatin izoladu ida ne’ebé sai nu'udår uma ba Richard Daschbach. Labarik mane na'in lima mai ho nia, wainhira nia la'o mai iha eskada Ai ne'ebé liga ba iha nia uma ne'ebé ho fondasi halo hosi sementi no didin ho Au no kakuluk taka ho kalen.

Daschbach (agora ho idade 82) konkorda hodi ko'alia ho Tempo Timor. Molok entrevista ne’e hahú, nia lori bua ho malus ida. Bainhira nia mama bua no malus ne’e, hatudu sensu katak nia hatene no moris di'ak, kor mean nakonu iha nia ibun. Daschbach - hatais kalsa naruk kor-azul, kamizola polo ho kor malahuk ho plástiku malahuk ida, tur iha kadeira plástiku kor azul iha nia uma ida ne'ebé ho kuartu ida de’it, iha livru, no sasan kiik sira seluk, iha kama boot ne’ebé taka ho muskiteiru. Hosi nia lensa matan kor azul ne’e, hateke loos ba iha entrevistador.
Daschbach, ne’ebé moris iha Estados Unidos Amérika, to’o iha Timor Osidentál iha tinan 1966, nu’udár amu Pâroko, iha parokia ida iha foho besik iha munisípiu Kefamenanu (Indonésia). Hafoin Koloniál Portugés sai husi Timor-Leste, Daschbach muda ba Oecusse. Maibé, ida ne’e to’o tinan 1990, molok nia hela permanente iha Kutet. Nia hateten “Iha podér espesial ida ne’ebé mak foti’o, atu hakbesik ho ida-ne’e” nia mos akresenta “Iha rekursu ida ne’ebé mak espesial, Foho no Ema”. Nia hetan autorizasaun hosi nia kongregasaun Societas Verbi Divini (SVD, Sosiedade sira kona-bá Maromak nia Liafuan) hodi harii uma retiru ida. Maibé, buat ne’e sai la hanesan. Hanesan baibain labarik barak no Daschbach deside atu estabelese Uma mahon Topu Honis. Nia hateten ba Tempo Timor “. Prosesu ne’e hahu ho la’o normál, bainhira labarik sira mesak mai rasik”

Topu Honis iha fatin rua. Labarik sira hela iha Kutet, no adolescentsa iha suku Mahata tasi-ibun. Tuir website hosí organizasaun ne’e katak, Topu Honis mak “Lalehan Seguru”, ba oan ki’ak no adulto sira ne’ebé defisiante inklui fetó’sira ne’ebé hetan abu zu. Fornese saúde, aihan, eskola nu’udár fatin seguru, suporta edukasaun nomos kria oportunidade servisu. Daschbach hateten katak, durante tinan banak nia laran, labarik atus-ba-atus mak hela iha Topu Honis. Nia la fó número kiaru koba-bá labarik hirak ne’e, tanba sira laiha lista. Organizasaun ne’e hetan suportu fundus hosí estranjeiru no doadores (nu’udár exemplu iha fulan Fevereiru tinan 2018, uma mahon ne’e, hetan osan dolar Amerikan u $100.000).

Durante UN patrosina referendu iha tinan 1999, bainhira Timor-Oan maioría vota ba independénsia, hosi okupasaun Indonézia, durante tinan 24 nia laran. Topu Honis proteze refuijada barak ne’ebé mak halai hosí hahalok brutál milisía no militár Indonézia. To’o sira hotu halai ba iha ai-laran, hodi salva sira nia moris. Uma mahon Topu Honis hetan sunu hotu.

Daschbach hetan rekoñesimentu, tanba bele salva refuziadiu sira. Uma mahon ne’e konstrui fila-fali metro 200, sa’e tan ba foho leten. Taur Matan Ruak ne’ebé nu’udár eis-komandante Falintil, Xefi Armada nomos asumi kargu hanesan Presidente República no agora dau-daua nu’udár Primeiru Ministru, iha VIII Governu Konstitusional, dalaruma hala’o vizita ba fatin ne’e, nu’udár símbolu respeitu ba Amu-lulik Daschbach no hodí hanoi fila-fali katak, labarik mane na’in rua, ne’ebé hela iha Kutet, agora dau-daua sai nu’udár seguransa pesoál ba Taur Matan Ruak.

Maibé, iha fulan Fevereiru tinan 2018 SVD, simu ale gasaun hirak ne’e katak, Daschbach halo ona abuzu seksuál, ba labarik ne’ebé moris iha Kutet. Nai-ulun ba kongregasaun iha Roma, haruka Fr. Yohanes Suban Gapun, superior SVD ba rejaun ida ne’e, iha Timor-Leste, hodi bá Oecusse no foci Daschbach bá Díli.

Enkuantu kongregasaun investiga kazu ne’e, Amu-lulik suspende tha no hetan bandu atu hala’o misa ka atividade igreja. Maski nune’e, durante entrevista ho Tempo Timor, Daschbach hato’o versaun seluk no insisti katak, nia mai iha SDV Díli, tamba durante tinan banak ona, nia seidau iha loron deska nsa ne’ebé d’ak, “Hau hela iha Ne’ebá durante fulan 6 hanesan feriadiu” nia hateten.

Bainhira husu kona-bá, investigasaun hosí nia kongregasaun ba alegasaun kona-bá abuzu seksuál, nia hatete: ‘Ha’u la hatete buat ida, kona-bá ne’e.’ Nia mós reklama la lembra kona-bá polisía nacionál, ne’ebé lori nia, hodi hato’o nia declarasaun, maski iha fotografía sira ne’ebé, mak hasai durante sorumutu hirak ne’e. “Ha’u la hanoi hetan ida ne’e. Ha’u okupadu ho buat seluk”, nia hatete.

Iha fulan Agustu tinan 2018, sem autorizasaun hosí nia superiór, Daschbach husik ofisina SVD iha Díli, hodi fili hikas ba Kutet no hela iha nia uma Topu Honis. Nia hatete: “Ha’u deside antes ona katak, ha’u sei ba (iha Díli, TT) fulan neen nia laran”. “Tempu ona hodi fili-fali mai iha ne’e”

Daschbach mós deside, atu formalmente rezigna-aan husi nia kongregasaun no hateten katak, nia sai tanba iha konflitu ho SVD. Nia hatete ba Tempo Timor “Sira hakarak sira mós involve iha Topu Honis”. “Tan ne’e, ha’u hakerek karta, hodi rezigna-aan hosí SVD. Tanba ne’e agora sira laiha tan poder legál iha Topu Honis, tanba ha’u la’os sira nia membru ona”. Fahe malu ida ne’e, laiha impaktu maka’as ba nia. “Ida ne’e hanesan buat kik-oan ida ba ha’u”.

Iha fulan Novembru, Vatikanu deside, atu hasai Amu-lulik nu’udár membru relijiozu, tanba Daschbach hala’o abuzu seksuál ba labarik sira.

Relasiona ho desizaun ne’e, reasaun Daschbach mak “Regras ne’e regras. Ema ne’e ema” wainhira Tempo Timor husu atu esplika signifika hosí nia liafuan ne’e, nia hatan katak “Regras la’os ema. Ema la’os regras. Ha’u labele esplika liu ida ne’e”


"Ha’u asina de’it”
Daschbach insiste nia la hatene kona-bá alegasaun hirak ne’e katak, nia halo abuzu seksuál ba labarik sira. "Lae. Klaru katak lae. Se ha’u hatene ida-ne’e, ha’u sei la hela tan iha ne’e”, nia hatán no la elobara tan resposta ruma. No “Laiha komentáriu” mak nia hodi resposta ba pergunta sira tuir mai. Ida ne’e, mak sai nu’udár nia estratejia, ba alegasaun molok ne’e katak, “ha’u toba ba mai ho feto sira ne’ebé besik iha área refere”. Nia deside hodi la fó atensaun ba ida ne’e. “O tenki kulit mahar wainhira rona rumores” Nia reasaun mak sempre “Ha’u nunka nega. Hau nunka konfirma. Laiha komentáriu de’it”

Maibé, bainhira Tempo Timor husu, karik nia la book ka la kaer ona labarik sira ne’e?, nia hatan ho hirus katak “Ne’e ha’u nia privadu, la’os o nian”. Nune’e Daschbach hamrik hosí nia kadeira no hakotu entrevista ne’e, hodi dehan “Ita tenki para ona “Entrevista” agora. Ida ne’e to’o ona”