

Solidarity in the Field: Observing Timor-Leste's Popular Consultation

Timor-Leste Studies Association

By: Charles Scheiner and Pam Sexton

(with some photos by Jörg Meier and Anna Voss)

27 June 2019

International Federation for East Timor

- **Formed in 1991 to inform and lobby the U.N. to support self-determination in Timor-Leste.**
- **By 1999, included 30 Timor-Leste solidarity groups from every continent.**
- **Loose cooperation, most campaigning at national and regional levels.**
- **International coordination for U.N. testimony, monitoring U.N. processes.**
- **Cooperated with CNRM/CNRT, but independent.**

**Kan Akatani founded IFET in July 1991.
He was a retired UN staffer who represented the
Japanese Catholic Council for Justice and Peace.**



**With Rep. Nancy Pelosi and ETAN Washington
staffer Lynn Fredrikssen exposing covert U.S.
training for the Indonesian military, 1997.**



International Federation for East Timor (IFET)

Consultation Observation Project

East Timor field office

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RT/RW 01 (di depan SD 4)

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Working Group

Australia-East Timor Association

Australians for a Free East Timor

Brisbane E. Timor Office (Australia)

Campaign for an Independent East Timor (South Australia)

East Timor International Support Centre (Australia)

Friends of East Timor, W. Australia

Hobart East Timor Comm. (Australia)

Canadian Action for Indonesia and East Timor

East Timor Alert Network (Canada)

Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (Fiji)

East Timor Group of Committee of 100 (Finland)

Agir Pour Timor (France)

Association Solidarité Timor-Oriental (France)

Gesellschaft für Bedrohte Völker (Germany)

Watch Indonesia! (Germany)

East Timor Roundtable (Hong Kong)

Indian Society for Human Rights

Forum Solidaritas Untuk Rakyat Timor Lorosae (FORTILO, Indonesia)

BECOMING AN OBSERVER PROJECT VOLUNTEER

Thank you for your interest in becoming a volunteer with the International Federation for East Timor Observation Project. This is an exciting and demanding project which has evolved rapidly to address the urgent needs of the East Timorese. With the August East Timor ballot date coming up quickly, we are very busy reviewing applications, scheduling interviews, and coordinating volunteer trainings in various places. Before filling out the attached application, we ask you to seriously consider the following basic criteria established for volunteers. Volunteers will need:

• **Flexibility:** The face due to the Timor. Volunteer effective in ensuring

• **Time:** We require age volunteers

• **Good Health:** ical services in with a doctor's

• **Stability/Maturity:** Volunteers will be working in a very stressful situation. Under the current conditions, working (as well as living) in East Timor is emotionally and mentally challenging. We suggest that the minimum age for participants be 25 years,

In three months, IFET mobilized 125 trained, accredited observers from 22 countries to go to Timor-Leste.

(Germany)

Watch Indonesia! (Germany)

East Timor Roundtable (Hong Kong)

Indian Society for Human Rights

Forum Solidaritas Untuk Rakyat Timor Lorosae (FORTILO, Indonesia)

with a doctor's signature verifying good health.

• **Stability/Maturity:** Volunteers will be working in a very stressful situation. Under the current conditions, working (as well as living) in East Timor is emotionally and mentally challenging. We suggest that the minimum age for participants be 25 years, though we will make exceptions on a case by case basis.

• **Commitment to Non-Violence:** IFET is committed to nonviolence and expects all participants to adhere absolutely to this principle, agreeing not to participate in, encourage or support violence in any way.

• **Commitment to Neutrality:** The objective of this project is to support the right to self-determination of the East Timorese under the U.N.-administered consultation. We will not campaign either for or against Indonesia's autonomy plan, nor will we advance any political viewpoint, either by word or action. Any real or perceived partisanship by volunteers seriously threatens the effectiveness and safety of all those involved.

• **Ability to Work Within Project Guidelines:** Volunteers will be expected to sign a contract stating that they understand and agree to follow the guidelines of the project. Volunteers will need to respect and follow the decisions of the project coordinators.

América Latina y África (Spain)

Östtimor Kommiten (Sweden)

TAPOL (U.K.)

British Coalition for East Timor

East Timor Action Network (USA)

International Secretariat, Parliamentarians for East Timor

• **Language:** English will be the primary language of the project and having volunteers who are fluent and/or conversant in Indonesian will be a priority. Knowledge of Portuguese is an asset, but not as important to the project as Indonesian.

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IFET Observer Project National Coordinators		
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IFET-OP was decentralized







IFET teams leaving for Same and Suai



Militia Leaders and their Commanders



Militia Leader Eurico Guterres, Balibo



Generals Timbul Silaen & Tono Suratman, Dili



Militia Commander Joao Tavares, Balibo



Feisal Tanjung, Ali Alatas, Wiranto, Yunus Yosfiah in Dili (July 1999)

International Federation for East Timor (IFET)

Observer Project Report #1

For Immediate Release: 8 July 1999

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<http://www.etan.org/ifet>

Report on the Militia Attack
on the Humanitarian Team in Liquiça

A pro-Indonesia armed militia, Red and White Iron Rod (Besi Merah Putih), attacked a convoy of 77 persons in the town of Liquiça on July 4, 1999. The convoy was returning to the capital city of Dili after delivering food and medicine to thousands of internally displaced persons in and around the village of Sare (Ermera district). The coalition that organized the convoy, the Humanitarian Team, consisted of workers and volunteers of six East Timorese NGOs: Yayasan Hak, Etadep, Caritas East Timor, Yayasan Kasimo, Timor Aid, and Posko for Emergency Aid to Internally Displaced Persons. It was accompanied by an official of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and the Humanitarian Affairs Officer of the United Nations Assistance Mission to East Timor, Patrick Burgess. Dan Murphy, an American medical doctor, and Max White, a member of the IFET Observer Project, also accompanied the mission.

The militia attack on the Humanitarian Team in Liquiça on July 4, 1999 must be seen in the context of the humanitarian crisis created by the militias. According to the UNHCR, an estimated 30,000 East Timorese have fled their homes over the past six months in the face of attacks by pro-Indonesia militias such as Besi Merah Putih (BMP). The displaced persons have fled to forests and villages of the remote interior where they are struggling for survival. They lack adequate food, medical care, and

IFET-OP VOLUNTEERS WITNESS MILITIA ATTACK IN SAME

On August 6, the IFET-OP team in Same witnessed a militia attack against a group of unarmed students and refugees who had sought shelter in a church compound following threats from paramilitaries the previous day. According to the information we received, the militia members attacked the students and refugees with knives and machetes, severely injuring one of the students in the hand and shoulder, and slightly injuring another.

Indonesian police were near the site at the time of the attack, but failed to respond quickly.

The students had sought refuge in the Catholic church in Same on August 5 after having received threats from members of a militia group. The students were trying to open an office of their organization in the town, but paramilitary intimidation prevented them from doing so.

Following the attack, the students and refugees fled to a nearby UNAMET registration site at a local Catholic school. Reportedly, UNAMET personnel explained to the students that there was nothing that they could do to help them, as it was beyond the UNAMET mandate.

UNAMET officials, however, have met with Indonesian authorities and have received assurances from them that they will protect the students and refugees who have now returned to the church compound.

Quick media work by IFET-OP led to coverage of the attack by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the Agence France Presse wire service.

ACCREDITATION OF IFET-OP OBSERVERS CONTINUES TO PROGRESS

More than 140 IFET-OP volunteers have received UNAMET accreditation. Randall Garrison (from Canada) is the interim Consultation Officer and is, thus, the person in IFET-OP/Dili responsible for the organization's role in the accreditation process here in Dili.

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IFET OBSERVER PROJECT BULLETIN

Issue #6

Week ending August 6, 1999

REGISTRATION OBSERVATION

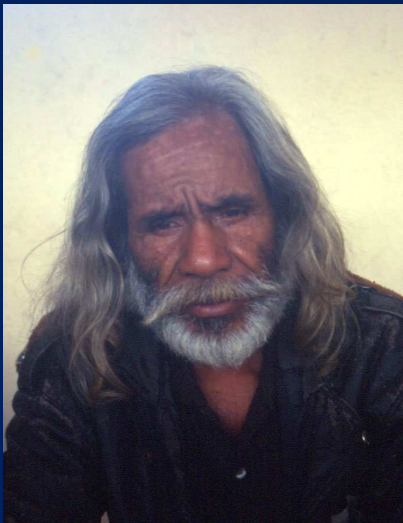
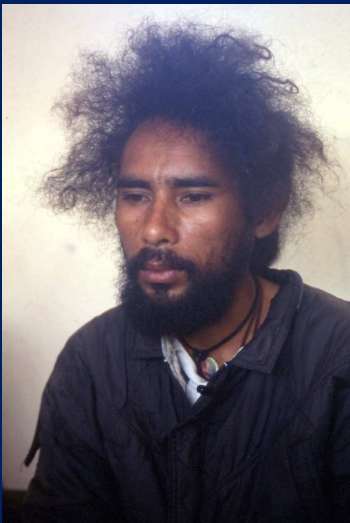
The last week of voter registration was a busy one for IFET-OP. The team based in Baucau visited UNAMET registration sites throughout the district including some in Quelicai and Venilale. IFET-OP volunteers also went to Batugade and Balibo (both near the border with West Timor) to investigate accusations of wide-spread voter registration fraud, allegedly involving bringing in ineligible voters from West Timor. IFET-OP also observed sites throughout the Dili area, Maliana, Maubisse, Ainaro, and Same.

Based on these registration observations and interviews with individuals and groups in a variety of locations, IFET-OP was able to issue its third report (on August 3), dealing with the first 19 days of registration. (Registration was scheduled to end on August 4, but the United Nations extended the registration for two days in East Timor, and four days for sites outside the territory.)

The IFET-OP report raised serious concerns about the continuing presence of Indonesian military-backed militia groups and associated political violence, as well as about wide-spread intimidation of would-be voters. In terms of its recommendations, IFET-OP called upon UNAMET to extend the voter registration period in areas of relative proximity to concentrations of internal refugees, tens of thousands of whom probably had not yet had the opportunity to register. IFET-OP also called upon UNAMET to increase quickly the presence of police (CivPols) and Military Liaison Officers in East Timor. Finally, the report called upon the United Nations to begin immediate negotiations with the Indonesian government to introduce international peacekeeping troops into East Timor given the inability or unwillingness of the Indonesian authorities to bring about the conditions necessary for a "free and fair" vote. *The Jakarta Post*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the Agence France Presse wire service all quoted the IFET-OP report.



Refugees at Ave Maria Church, Suai, July 1999



"Our women and children are still in the villages and forests. They will be raped and tortured. We, as men, will be killed on the spot for supporting independence."



Autonomy Campaign in Oecussi (August 1999)

Independence (CNRT) Campaign in Oecussi (August 1999)



CNRT Campaign rally



Pro-autonomy, Dili, August 1999



Dili, East Timor
24 August 1999

The Honorable Kofi Annan
United Nations Secretary-General
New York, NY 10017 USA
By fax to: 1-212-963-2155

We are writing to you to express our grave concerns regarding the security situation surrounding the Popular Consultation in East Timor. When we wrote to you on May 3 and May 23, 1999, we expressed serious reservations about leaving responsibility for security in the hands of the Indonesian authorities, rather than in those of the United Nations. Unfortunately, the Indonesian military has indeed seriously undermined the Popular Consultation, and has done so to such an extent to throw into question the legitimacy of the August 30 vote.

More specifically, the International Federation for East Timor Observer Project (IFET-OP) believes that elements of the Indonesian security apparatus and the pro-integration militias with which they are allied have created such terror in the territory so as to skew the vote in favor of those using intimidation and violence. Such an outcome could have far-reaching negative repercussions both for East Timor and the United Nations.

representatives from organizations representing the diversity of East Timorese society.

Less than one week remains before the scheduled vote. Our gravest concern continues to be the safety of the East Timorese people. There are pervasive fears within the East Timorese population that the Indonesian military-backed militias will launch a wave of terror around, or shortly after, the time of the ballot in an effort to derail the United Nations consultation process. IFET-OP is not in a position to predict exactly what will take place around the time of the vote. We do, however, feel that fears of a bloodbath are based on a variety of credible factors. Furthermore, we believe that the international community, as represented by the United Nations, has a duty to ensure that these fears do not come to fruition. If the U.N. fails to fulfill its responsibility, the East Timorese population will be exposed to great violence in the face of a formidable Indonesian military establishment that is extremely hostile to the right to East Timorese self-determination.

IFET-OP roving team prepares to visit teams in the districts.



Pervasive violence perverts the kids.



For Immediate Release:
Saturday, August 28, 1999

IFET-OP Report #7

East Timor Consultation:
Campaign Period Ends in Wave of Pro-Integration Terror

In Oecussi, Maliana, Dili, and Los Palos, Indonesian-military backed militia forces rampage; demonstrates need for increased international security presence.

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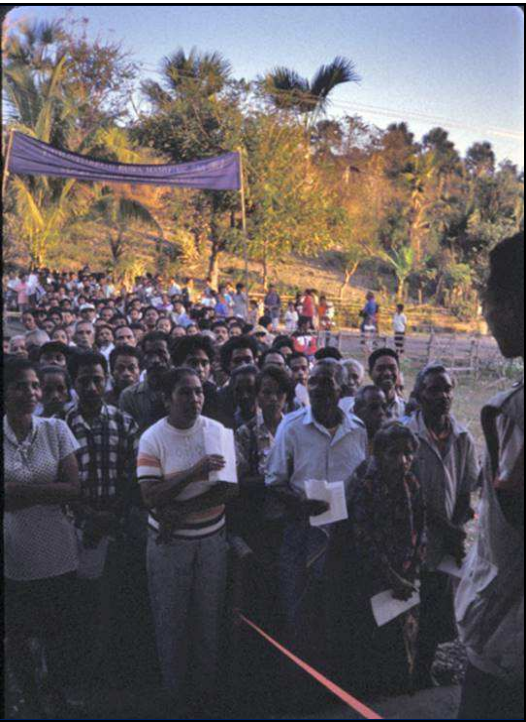
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The upsurge in violence over the last two days places the entire consultation process in jeopardy. Unless the UN and the international community take quick and decisive action to stem the violence, the results of Monday's balloting will be contaminated by fear.

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**Waiting to
vote in Suai**



IFET observer sealing a ballot box



International Federation for East Timor Observer Project
(IFET-OP)

CONTACT IN DILI
Tel: 62-390-321969 • Fax: 62-390-321264 • ifet@dili.wasantara.net.id

*Contacts: Media Coordinator, Saskia Kouwenberg.
Spokespeople, Joseph Nevins and Russell Anderson.
Media Contact, Sabine Hammer.*

September 1, 1999

Report #8

**Ominous Signs Only Two Days After Historic East Timor Vote;
Militia Roadblocks, and Widespread Threats Against Local Population,
International Observers, and UNAMET Personnel.**

There are signs that the security situation in East Timor is deteriorating again, only two days after the historic ballot that saw more than 95 percent of eligible voters go to the polls. Indonesian military-backed militia groups, which kept a low profile on the day of the August 30 vote, have re-emerged, engaging in widespread intimidation, establishing menacing roadblocks throughout the territory, and causing.

There is a profound and pervasive sense of fear as the counting of the ballots begins in Dili. Last night, IFET-OP received reports of militia activity in a number of Dili neighborhoods, including Caicoli, Bidau Massau, Becora, and Camea. Militia members, armed with automatic weapons, circulated throughout these neighborhoods, frequently firing into the air. Although there are no brief accounts of the factors that led to these withdrawals.

Thursday, September 2, 1999.

IFET-OP Report No. 9:

Post-Vote Assessment of the Consultation Process

The International Federation for East Timor Observer Project (IFET-OP) considers the actual voting day, August 30, to have been generally highly successful. According to officials of the United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), over 95 percent of registered voters went to the polls. This would be an incredible achievement in any country. That such a voter turnout took place in East Timor, a territory wracked by warfare and where intimidation and fear are rife, is all the more amazing. More broadly, IFET-OP acknowledges the excellent job that UNAMET officials have done in administering the consultation process.

Although IFET-OP believes that UNAMET administered the process in a “free and fair” manner, we have serious concerns about the environment in which the consultation has taken place. The context surrounding the consultation process was not free and fair. Rather, it was one characterized by violence, intimidation, and fear created by pro-integration militia groups backed by a significant portion of the Indonesian security apparatus. These efforts biased the context in favor of the pro-autonomy camp, and has perhaps distorted the outcome of the vote. Nevertheless, the massive voter turnout suggests that the East Timorese people overcame the climate of fear and terror to a significant degree, demonstrating their strong resolve to determine their political future and to resolve peacefully the contested status of their homeland.

The vote and the preceding phases of the consultation are steps in a process of self-determination, a process that has not yet concluded. For this reason, IFET-OP calls upon the international community to provide UNAMET with the political support and resources necessary to carry out its mission. Given the apparent inability and/or unwillingness of the Indonesian police and military authorities to protect the East Timorese population, this requires a significant strengthening of the international presence in the territory, especially in terms of security.

of either the autonomy or independence options.

IFET-OP Dili, 4 September 1999
waiting for the results.



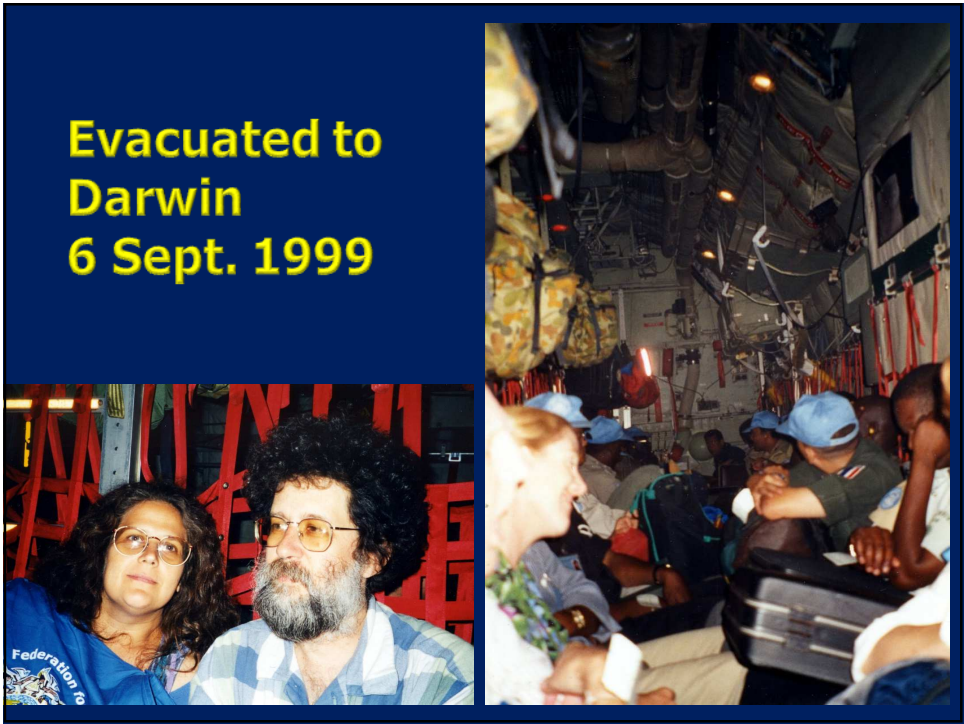
Dili's main street deserted
An hour after the result (4 Sept. 1999)






April 2002





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Media Statement After Being Evacuated from East Timor

We are speaking for the International Federation for East Timor Observer Project, which brought more than 120 volunteer observers to East Timor from all over the world to observe the U.N. popular consultation process.

Today, September 7, the last of our observers was forced to leave East Timor. Over the past two days, the Royal Australian Air Force evacuated 60 of our nonpartisan volunteers to Darwin from Dili and Baucau.

We left East Timor for safety, but with tremendous sadness. The East Timorese people have no Australia to run to, no place to hide from militia terror. Last night, Australia and Indonesian military officers prevented one of our East Timorese staff members from boarding the plane with us -- and he faces an unspeakable horror shared by hundreds of thousands of his fellow East Timorese.

Most international observers and media fled East Timor before IFET-OP had to leave, and we were the last international NGO to leave. UNAMET has withdrawn from the entire country except

As we escaped East Timor, both IFET-OP and the people we left behind kept thinking of 1975, when the international community abandoned East Timor, allowing the Indonesian military to invade and kill 200,000 people with impunity while the nations of the world closed their eyes.

It is beginning to happen again -- and this time it must not be ignored. By its actions, the Indonesian military has not only declared war on the people of East Timor, but on the United Nations -- the representative of all nations of the world. No government would respond to such attacks with delegations and discussions. It is long past time for the international community to take immediate, forceful and effective action to stop the killings in East Timor.

For months, the world has accepted the Indonesian fiction that the militias, the military, and the police are separate entities. As our observers have seen in numerous incidents, and as virtually every East Timorese person knows in their bones, these are interchangeable uniforms with the same people, the same weapons sources, and the same purpose. Yesterday's declaration of

Hundreds of East Timorese, including many UNAMET local staff, have been killed by militias since the August 30 ballot. Foreign journalists and CivPols have been targeted and wounded. Yet there have been no casualties among the TNI or the police. If those armed government forces are truly opposing militias that have shown no reluctance to kill, why are they not subject to the same murderous wrath as the civilian population?

In two weeks, Indonesian troops and their militias destroyed three-fourths of the buildings and infrastructure. They killed hundreds of people and forced 200,000 to flee to the mountains or to Indonesia.





At Bill Clinton's new home in New York, September 1999.



Where people once lived - Dili



A large crowd of people is gathered outdoors for a protest. They are holding up numerous handmade signs with messages related to East Timor. Visible signs include "FOR TIMOR", "U.N. - U.S.A. STOP ANOTHER HOLOCAUST", "FREE TIMOR LORO SAE", "GOD + HELP TIMOR", "PEACE OR TIMOR", "INDONESIA HELP MURDER MO...", "TIMOR WILL WIN IF TIMOR YOU", "SAVE IN TIMOR", "WITH IS STRONGER ALL HAVE SOLD", "NO NUCLEAR PROOF ZONE", "POLICE", "PAZ PARA PERMANECER", and "TIMOR PAZ". Many individuals are also making peace symbols with their hands. The background shows a brick building.

IFET continued to appeal to the international community:

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Thank you.

You can find more information at

- IFET sub-site

<http://www.etan.org/ifet/default.htm>

<http://www.etan.org/ifet/ifetop.htm>

- La'o Hamutuk

<http://www.laohamutuk.org>

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