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Submission:

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Submission to the Defence White Paper

The Australia-East Timor Friendship Association (SA) Inc. wishes to address Chapter 4 - Key Tasks for Defence, Defence and National Security and Providing Military Support to Australian Statecraft and in Support of the International Rule of Law. We do this in spite of grave doubts about the validity of the consultation, knowing that the Chairman, Stephen Loosely, is a director of Thales, one of Australia's largest armament manufacturers, and that the Minister for Defence, Joel Fitzgibbon, in a statement to the National Press Club on Wednesday 30th July, said that the ALP in government is committed to "an increase in our investment in Defence, not a decrease."

We believe that Australia's security can only be advanced by promoting the freedom and prosperity of the people of our region. We need to focus on the real threats to security - poverty, hunger, climate change and environmental degradation and the lack of good governance, effective democracy and liberty. Weapons do nothing to alleviate these security problems. In the words of Commander Robert Green, now retired from the Royal Navy, "Weapons stimulate hostility, create instability, promote proliferation and generate an arms race. They are dirty and poisonous and the ultimate virility symbol. They represent terrorist logic on the grandest scale imaginable."*

The acquisition of arms diverts enormous financial, technical and human resources from where they are really needed to a few armaments manufacturing corporations.

Australia could play a more positive role in the SE Asian and Pacific regions by using the money that is being spent on armaments on projects to improve food production, education, health and environmental protection, e.g, effective recycling programmes, reforestation, organic environmentally friendly farming methods, environmentally friendly industries including energy production, and by promoting good governance and capacity-building etc. The Australian Government could also develop many more initiatives for countries in our region to share their art and culture, thus contributing to goodwill and friendships rather than ill-will and mistrust.

Wherever possible this should be done in cooperation with the governments of the region, but our focus should always be on people. Governments come and go, and when they are repressive, their victims strive to free themselves. This is what happened in Timor-Leste and is happening in West Papua and other regions which the Indonesian Government occupies by force and without the free consent of the people concerned. For example, the Indonesian military is currently attacking West Papuans for exercising what should be their democratic right to fly their own flag and a number have received harsh prison sentences for this "crime". West Papua has been occupied by the TNI since 1962 and during that time has suffered genocide and massive human rights abuses.

Actions taken to protest against or overthrow an occupying power, even when violence is involved (unless that violence is aimed at innocent civilians), should not be designated as terrorism, and Australia should never allow its forces to be used against the protesters, or to aid the oppressors.

Australia should ban all future military cooperation with the Indonesian military (TNI) until

(a) it is brought completely under the control of civil and democratic government,

(b) all war criminals in its ranks are brought to justice and,

(c) it pulls out of West Papua.

Australia should call on the United Nations to organize a plebiscite of all adult West Papuans to allow them to determine their own political future. Australian troops could play a useful role in policing such a plebiscite to ensure there is no coercion.

In its 2000 report "Australian Defence Cooperation with Indonesia", the Senate Foreign Affairs and Trade References Committee said in paragraphs 8.51 and 8.53 that the dismantling of the territorial command structure should be a pre-condition to defence cooperation. (with Indonesia). The Committee said that the Territorial structure threatened Indonesia's fragile democracy & that it enabled gross human rights abuses, and that it would be "anathema" for Australia to support the military or any other element not strengthening democracy. It seems that little progress has been made in these respects.

Previous Australian governments claimed that by cooperating with Indonesian military forces, Australia would inculcate in them respect for human rights - a claim proved false by events in Timor-Leste. History has shown that we can never expect respect for human rights from forces whose purpose is to enforce a hated regime.

The people of Timor-Leste are still traumatised from 24 years of Indonesian occupation and the devastation of 1999. They want to see those responsible brought to account and punished. Until this happens there will be little respect for the rule of law. The Australian Government could help by supporting a United Nations War Criminals Court to try the offenders and making sure any convicted do not find refuge in Australia.

Our troops should be trained in peace-keeping and to assist in the event of natural calamities. Their expertise could be used in ways that help our neighbours, such as building roads, providing clean water, sustainable energy projects, good governance and capacity building. This way would build the prosperity of the region and promote goodwill between us.

In future, any overseas deployment of Australian troops should be authorized by Federal Parliament, the only exception being when Australian territory is under attack

I agree to my submission being published on the Defence website

I agree to my submission being quoted in the Community Consultation Report