

meetingplace

ISSUE 3 SUMMER 2006

FROM THE DIRECTOR

November and December were busy months for Uniya. Senior Researcher Mark Byrne coordinated the national launches of *Chega!* ("Enough!"), the final report of the Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR).

There were launches of the CAVR report in Sydney, Melbourne, Ballarat, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra between 12 and 28 November, and two forums (in Sydney and Melbourne) on the future of justice and reconciliation in Timor-Leste. Before the Canberra launch, the Timor-Leste Ambassador to Australia, His Excellency Hernani Coelho da Silva, hosted the first Independence Day reception at Albert Hall, just down the hill from Parliament House. The day after the Canberra launch Democrat Senator Natasha Stott-Despoja formally tabled *Chega!* in the Senate.

These events were well attended, with the help of local groups in each city. It is also gratifying that the launches are likely to lead to more interest by Australian politicians in the near future in justice and reconciliation initiatives related to Timor-Leste.

Also in November, we welcomed to Uniya the Governor of NSW, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, as she launched *Acting on Conscience*, Fr Frank Brennan's new book. In December, Uniya celebrated

Christmas with JRS and launched the book from the Uniya Seminar Series titled *Good Neighbour Bad Neighbour: Australia's relations with Indonesia*. The book is sold exclusively through Uniya and would make a great present. An order form is on the back of this newsletter.

The survey by Minh Nguyen on Asia Pacific non-governmental organisation opinions of Australia has been completed and will be released in the next two weeks. I would like to also thank with great appreciation Minh, a wonderful staff member whose multi-skilling has ensured the website stayed up to date and relevant. Minh has also completed critical research projects and he will be sadly missed when he leaves Uniya in December. We also thank three interns this year for their valuable contributions to our projects: Mikaela Blackwood, Marta Iljadica and Amanda Spasic.

Thank you to all our friends, volunteers and supporters who have generously given their time, efforts, donations and expertise to ensure the success of Uniya projects. Every blessing at Christmas to you and your families. We are looking forward to a productive 2007.

Blessings and Peace
Mary Bryant



MeetingPlace is a quarterly publication of the Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre

Uniya is a Jesuit centre for social justice and human rights



Regional relations report card

By Minh Nguyen

It has been a busy year for the Australian Government in its engagement with the Asia Pacific region with several crises in the Pacific and the volatile relationship with Indonesia to manage. Prime Minister John Howard seems to have managed these issues well enough to confidently boast in Vietnam that Australia is 'naturally and comfortably and permanently part of this region' and 'a country which has both a presence and a significance in the region.' But to what extent does the region share his assessment of the relationship?

While a poll in October by the Lowy Institute suggested that 'Australians are comfortable with Asia and our Pacific neighbours,' it is only now that there is evidence of what our neighbours really think about us. According to a survey of regional non-governmental organisation (NGO) opinions conducted by Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre in partnership with Griffith Asia Institute, there is significant goodwill in the region towards Australia. The bad news for the Government was that there is no evidence of a link between Australia's good image and its foreign policies. In fact, the survey respondents cringed over Australia's immigration and trade policies, and the way in which it engages with other nations in the region.

The study, conducted in June and July, sought to understand how NGOs in the Asia Pacific region perceive Australia and whether or not their perceptions are changing. It was also designed to explore the foreign policy issues that concern these organisations and the perceived impediments to better relations between Australia and the region. Researchers at Uniya focused on the opinions of NGOs as they have strong links to the general public and would be able to reflect or influence the views and perceptions of ordinary citizens. Although there are suggestions that 'the sum of NGO opinions does not equal public opinion', this group is increasing its influence in national and international politics.

The results show that NGOs in the region generally have 'positive feelings' toward Australia and regard Australia as a 'good international citizen,' although Pacific respondents are a bit more hesitant about this assessment than their Asian counterparts. While many respondents said their feelings about Australia have not changed in the past year, of those whose feelings have changed, nearly twice as many say they have changed for the worse. Putting Australia on notice, NGOs in the Pacific, ironically the group with the most contact with Australians, have become even more

dissatisfied about Australia over the past year compared to Asian organisations.

In addition, Asian and Pacific respondents showed little in common with the Government's top foreign policy priorities. Their concern for the global environment, which is shared by the Australian public according to the Lowy Institute poll, shows that the Government is also lagging behind regional opinion on this issue. The survey seems to suggest that Asia and Pacific NGOs placed greater importance on regional or global than national issues.

Controlling illegal immigration, combating terrorism, and strengthening their country's economy are listed among the least important foreign policy goals for the Asia Pacific. This is in contrast to the Australian Government's heightened concerns in recent years over these issues, illustrated by the foreign and trade ministers' assertion that 'security threats, especially from terrorism and people smuggling' and 'reform of our own economy' are the top priorities bearing on Australia's reputation.

While in his speech in Vietnam the Prime Minister talked up the positives for the region of Australia's close military and economic relationship with the United States, the survey's respondents did not seem to agree. Asked whether they agree that a close relationship between Australia and the US is positive for their region, twice as many NGOs disagreed with the statement than agreed. Comparing this to the same statement regarding mainland China, regional organisations generally agreed that a close relationship between Australia and China is positive for the region. NGOs do not seem deterred by China's growing economic and military influence, and although they consider Australia's cultural heritage closer to Europe or America, they would rather see Australia turn its attention away from the US and towards Asia and the Pacific.

Although differences in perception of foreign policy priorities are not enough to threaten good relations, there are some issues that are clearly sensitive for the region. Australia's strict immigration laws, its restrictions on temporary working visas, and its harsh policy on asylum seekers are impacting on Australia's reputation. The quantity and quality of Australian development aid and unfair trade have also been listed as barriers to better relations.

The region in general feels positive about Australia but the survey suggests the need for improvement. It suggests that Australia's pragmatic bilateral approach

to diplomacy is not enough to win the hearts and minds of civil society. It also implies that transnational issues like migration, development aid and fair trade are critical concerns for our neighbours. While Australia ponders about stricter immigration rules and citizenship requirements, the level of its contact with civil society in Asia and the Pacific remains worryingly low. All

push and no pull does not make for a good regional image. These are considerations that the Government will ignore at its own peril as it seeks greater ties with ASEAN and greater influence over events in the Pacific.

Minh Nguyen is Uniya's Research Officer. The full report will be published on the Uniya website, www.uniya.org.

Asking hard questions about Indonesia

By Julie Morgan

Throughout Uniya's new book, *Good Neighbour, Bad Neighbour*, the 'problem of Papua' seems to sneak out of the shadows created by each essayist in their attempt to cast light on Indonesia and Australia. Other problems emerge when one speaks of Indonesia and, tragically, we know these wounds by heart now because of the brutal human rights abuses in East Timor, Aceh and Ambon and we know the perpetrators of these wounds, Indonesia's military, the TNI, which is so menacingly present in this book.

As Australians, these wounds have often been swept away as unacceptable to the national interest. But fortunately we are a group of social justice enthusiasts, advocates for the truth and so our concerns are not purely with Australian foreign policy as a discipline worth reading about but with the scars that result from that foreign policy on the backs of some of the world's most vulnerable people.

In assembling the speakers for the seminar series and in collating their contributions for this book, Uniya

offers us perspectives from academics and diplomats with deep experience in Australian foreign policy and Indonesian politics. We have much to learn as we turn the pages and many times I found myself nodding in agreement with the writers.

There are common threads which tie the essays together and to which we advocates would readily agree, such as the reminder that Indonesia has done extraordinarily well in emerging from the unparalleled carnage and brutality of the Suharto years to become a democracy which is surviving if not yet thriving. Many of the writers clearly want us to give credit where credit is due. And to all of us who have Indonesian friends, giving credit is a pleasure for we know how much they have wanted and therefore valued their journey from the darkness imposed by Suharto.

One might find it surprising but Melbourne academic Damien Kingsbury and former diplomat

Cont page 4



| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Name: | DONATION FORM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Address: | <input type="checkbox"/> I enclose a cheque for \$..... (payable to Uniya) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| State: Postcode: | <input type="checkbox"/> Please debit my credit card for | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Phone: | \$ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fax: | Card Number (MasterCard/VisaCard) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| E-mail: | <table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I wish to donate to Uniya | Expiry Date | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Please subscribe me to your email list | Signature | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Please return the completed form to Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre, PO Box 522, Kings Cross NSW 1340

Cont from page 3

Richard Woolcott actually agree that the contemporary conversation about Indonesia-Australia relations must start with the recognition that Indonesia does not pose a military threat to Australia; and yet the activities of one of our nearest neighbours do cause enormous trouble and tension. Australians can feel secure, but conversely, many Indonesians do not feel secure about our intentions towards their national sovereignty – not because of the threat of invading slouch hats but because many Australians ask disturbing and penetrating questions about the presence of Papua, Aceh and the Moluccas in the unified but diversified Republic of Indonesia.

A few months ago I had the privilege of being the only Catholic NGO representative invited to meet the visiting Indonesian parliamentary delegation during their one and only roundtable closed conversation with NGOs and academics. It was a few months after the Papuan 43 had caused so much trouble and both governments were trying to restore normal levels of diplomacy. We heard many times that afternoon about the necessity of respecting Indonesia’s sovereign rights.

On that occasion I had the opportunity to talk with the parliamentarians about the nature of sovereignty from an NGO perspective; that is, that sovereignty might

mean rights but it also means responsibility for ensuring the dignity and flourishing of one’s citizens and inhabitants. So while the ‘rights’ that supposedly adhere to borders occupies much of the conversation between and within Jakarta and Canberra, I think it’s our job as NGOs to make sure that we start talking about sovereignty in terms of responsibilities – for when a country for whatever reason abandons its responsibilities for full and equitable human development maybe that’s when neighbours can and should be concerned.

This is the best thing about this book and the series: we are called to ask hard questions about difficult topics but to do so in ways which are participatory. This is clearly Uniya’s place, for what this book of collected essays offers us is an opportunity to interrupt the public discourse on Australia’s relations with Indonesia in order to engage with it more constructively and with intelligent compassion. ■

Excerpt of Julie Morgan’s speech, launching Uniya’s new book, Good Neighbour, Bad Neighbour: Australia’s relations with Indonesia. Julie is the Promoter of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Friars in Australia. Full text at www.uniya.org.



ORDER FORM

New books



Name:

Address:

..... State: Postcode:

Phone: Email:

Good Neighbour, Bad Neighbour (100pp) \$15 Qty: Total:

Justice and reconciliation in East Timor (40pp) \$5 Qty: Total:

Postage & handling within Australia Qty: Total:

Please add \$3 for first item + \$2 for each extra items

Grand total:

I enclose a cheque/money order payable to Uniya

Please debit my credit card (MasterCard/Visa)

Card number: Exp:

Signature: