

MATCH IT!

Prime Minister of Australia
Mr Kevin Rudd, MHR
Parliament House, Canberra, A.C.T. 2600

25 January 2008

Dear Prime Minister

Match It! - Australian and Cuban education assistance to Timor Leste

We the following academics, writers, organisations and NGO workers observe these developments, on education assistance to Timor Leste:

- over 2002-2007 the number of University scholarships offered by the Australian Government to students from Timor Leste declined from 20 per year to 8 per year
- over 2003-2006 the number of medical training scholarships offered by the Government of Cuba to students from Timor Leste increased from 50 to 1,000

There are currently 800 students from Timor Leste studying medicine with the Cubans. This makes it probably the biggest aid program in medical training, per capita, in the world. Adult literacy training in Timor Leste is now also dominated by the Cubans.

So far there have been two Australian reactions (government, media, NGO) to Cuban programs in 'our' region. One was to ignore, snipe at or seek to undermine the Cubans, as perceived 'competitors'. The other is to respond with a generosity that matches them. We urge your government to strengthen this latter path and **match** the Cuban scholarship offer.

Cuban health and education programs are recognised and commended by the World Health Organisation and U.N.E.S.C.O.. But Australia also has great capacity to share through its schools, universities and teachers. There is a great deal of goodwill in our country towards the East Timorese, despite the damage done by the oil and gas dispute and the recent crisis.

We urge your government to begin a large scale public education program for the East Timorese, matching the Cuban offer of 1,000 scholarships, in areas in which we have great capacity, such as teacher training. We emphasise that the measure of support should be through the extent of human capacity building, not through a dollar sum.

The ordinary people of East Timor deserve nothing less from a rich and powerful neighbour that has so often let them down.

Yours sincerely

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John Pilger, filmmaker and author
Professor Frank Stilwell, Political Economy, University of Sydney
Pat Anderson, Board Chairperson, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health
Dr Ben Bartlett, Leader PHC Program, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health
Dr Meredith Burgmann, Former President of the NSW Legislative Council

Lee Rhiannon MLC, Greens member of NSW Legislative Council
Professor Stewart Firth, Head of the Pacific Centre, Australian National University
Shirley Shackleton, East Timor activist
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Max Lane, Indonesian Studies, University of Sydney
Dr George Morgan, University of Western Sydney
Dr Bob Boughton, University of New England
Dr Duncan McDuire-Ra, Development Studies, University of New South Wales
Peter Weitzel, teacher and union activist
Stephanie Lusby, Policy and Advocacy Director, Jubilee Australia
Jessica Bommer, Jubilee Australia
Dr. Danielle Celermajer, Director of Global Studies, University of Sydney
Dr. Robert Austin, Honorary Fellow, History, University of Melbourne
Peter Boyle, Democratic Socialist Perspective National Secretary
Emma Murphy and Stuart Munckton, Green Left Weekly Editors
Pip Hinman, Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific
Dr James Arvanitakis, Humanities and Languages, University of Western Sydney
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