



The Centre for Democratic Institutions

**Timor-Leste National Parliamentary Committee on
Foreign Affairs Defence and National Security
Study Tour on Parliamentary Accountability Processes**

Between 3 and 7 November 2003, a delegation from the Timor-Leste National Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security (Committee B) visited the Australian Parliament as part of a study tour conducted by CDI and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). This visit is the Timor-Leste Parliament's first official visit to Australia since independence. The aim of the visit was to study accountability processes within the Australian parliament and learn about parliamentary committees- their role and responsibilities and how to implement them. This study tour also provided the opportunity to promote and strengthen relations between parliamentarians from Australia and Timor-Leste.

Background

Timor-Leste's vote for independence in August 1999 was a historic step from occupied state towards independent nation. In October 1999, the United Nations Transitional Authority of Timor-Leste (UNTAET) was established to administer the new nation during the period of transition to independence. Timor-Leste, with assistance from the UN and other international donors, embarked on a process of nation building and in 2001, the Transitional Government of Timor-Leste was established. Timor-Leste was finally declared an independent nation in May 2002.

This CDI/NDI program intends to assist in the institution strengthening process through exposing members from the Timor-Leste National Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security to accountability processes and mechanisms within parliament and to share experiences, knowledge and ideas, where relevant, on the roles and responsibilities of parliamentary committees.

Participants

The delegation from Committee B that visited Canberra in November this year comprised:

- Mr. Jose Manuel Fernandes- Committee Chairman (Fretilin)
- Ms. Maria Solana da Costa Soares (Fretilin)
- Mr. Antonio da Costa Leland (Independent)
- Mr. Feliciano Alves Fatima (Social Democrat Association of East Timor)
- Mr. Lucio Marcal Gomes (Christian Democratic Party)
- Ms. Luisa da Costa (Fretilin)

The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Karen Polglaze, Senior Program Manager of NDI and Ms. Joana da Silva, the Senior Program Assistant of NDI, acting as the delegation's interpreter.

Program Aims

This study tour in Canberra is part of a broader NDI initiative supported by USAID/Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI). In 2002, NDI received funding from the OTI to conduct a program aimed at assisting the democratic development of the security sector in Timor-Leste. In 2003, the program entered into a partnership with Committee B aimed at capacity building of the committee. This recent visit to the Australian Parliament was set in conjunction with a similar visit to the New Zealand Parliament in Wellington the following week.

The program for Committee B's visit to Canberra was developed by CDI in association with NDI, based on the needs identified by the Timor-Leste National Parliament. The focus was on accountability processes within the Australian parliament and strategies for strengthening the capacity of parliamentary committees. The program also focused on a committee's roles and responsibilities and how to implement them. This also provided the opportunity to study general foreign policy, defence and security issues as well as the role of parliament.

The study tour emphasised the importance of reporting procedures and public accountability and in particular ways of reconciling the need to report on security issues while protecting national interest of which may require confidentiality of certain security information.

Program Content

The program began with a session conducted by CDI Director Roland Rich introducing Committee B to the Australian political system and the relevant concepts and terminology. This session paved the way for a more comprehensive understanding of the committee sessions observed in the course of the program.

Senate Estimates is an important procedure for ensuring government accountability. Part of the program was dedicated to learning about Senate Estimates and Senator Nick Sherry delivered a comprehensive overview of its purpose and procedures. Estimates was highlighted as an important mechanism for scrutinising Ministers and public servants and an effective means of exposing government management. Senator Sherry also outlined the important role of research staff in preparing for Estimates. Committee B viewed two sessions of Senate Estimates on foreign affairs and defence issues. This was followed by a debriefing by Roland Rich on the events that had taken place. Learning about Estimates was particularly useful to the Committee as the Timor-Leste National Parliament is currently in the process of passing its second budget. Committee B attended question time in the House of Representatives watching Australia's robust democracy in action.

In focusing on accountability processes, Committee B attended a session with the Department of the Parliamentary Library (DPL). This session examined the research and reporting facilities available to parliamentarians and the importance of effective research and librarian staff in an effective and accountable parliament. As the National Parliament of Timor-Leste is in the process of trying to strengthen their reporting and documenting, it was valuable to gain exposure to the DPL and the supportive role it plays in parliament. This session reinforced the link between an accountable parliament and effective reporting and documenting. The parliamentary staff also provided useful information on accessing research and policy papers on the Australian Parliament's website in Portuguese.

Complimenting the sessions on parliamentary accountability processes, Committee B met with members from a number of parliamentary committees with similar portfolios to their own. They met with the Australian Timor-Leste Friendship Parliamentary Group and with members from the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade and the Australian Labor Party's Parliamentary National Security Policy Committee. These meetings provided the opportunity for informal discussions on issues of common interest and concern between Timor-Leste and Australian parliamentarians. These meetings also provided the opportunity for Committee B to hear about the experiences of their Australian counterparts and question the members regarding obstacles and difficulties they have encountered in their role. The meeting with the ALP's policy committee provided the opportunity for discussions on policy formation from a party perspective. Issues of particular interest were the roles and responsibilities of a committee, the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties' report 'The Timor Sea Treaty' tabled in November 2002 and the issue of security in Timor-Leste following the UN withdrawal in mid-2004.

The program also included a meeting with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This provided an alternative perspective on accountability processes within an area relevant to the Committee's portfolio. Discussions held with departmental staff examined the accountability requirements of a government department to parliament, the relationship between the two, and their roles and responsibilities. DFAT's Doug Foskett explained how the Department assisted Ministers in preparing for question time, how the Department recommended responses to parliamentary committee reports and how the Department assisted parliamentary delegations.

Meeting various committees within parliament gave Committee B the opportunity to formally express their appreciation to the Australian Government for its continuing support and assistance to Timor-Leste, particularly since independence. Both the Timor-Leste and Australian parliamentarians saw this as a valuable opportunity to strengthen relations and share views with those parliamentarians with similar portfolios to their own.

Participant Evaluation

The delegation reported that all of the information sessions and meetings were informative and interesting. The issues discussed during the meetings were relevant to their committee work and the information they obtained will assist them in developing and strengthening the capacity of their own committee. From this visit, the delegation identified that there is a strong need for technical assistance within their parliament.

Outcomes and Future Initiatives

The delegation from Committee B valued the opportunity to share ideas and experiences with parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. These discussions helped the committee in thinking about solutions for developing and strengthening their own committee. It is hoped that the benefits gained from this visit will impact more broadly on the Timor-Leste parliament. The delegation intends to utilise the information learned in their committee work.

Based on this study tour, the delegation will produce a formal report listing recommendations, strategies and possible solutions for strengthening the capacity of Committee B. This is the first comprehensive report of a committee's activity to be documented within the Timor-Leste National Parliament. It is hoped that, given the positive response and outcomes from Committee

B's visit, CDI will be able to work with the Timor-Leste National Parliament in developing strategies for further strengthening their parliament.

PROGRAM

MONDAY 3 NOVEMBER

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| 12.00pm-1.20pm | Welcome lunch hosted by CDI |
| 1.30pm-3.45pm | Introductory session to the Australian political system
Roland Rich, CDI Director
Fellows Rooms, University House, ANU |
| 3.45pm | Delegation drive to Parliament House. |
| 4.15pm-5.15pm | Meeting with the Australian Labor Party's Parliamentary National Security Policy Committee
Hosted by Mr. Michael Danby |

TUESDAY 4 NOVEMBER

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| 9.00am-10.30am | Report writing time |
| 10.40am | Delegation will meet in the Senate Entrance of Parliament House . |
| 11.00-12.00pm | Meeting with Senator Nick Sherry about the procedures and functions of Senate Estimates |
| 12.15-1.15pm | Lunch |
| 2.30-3.30pm | Tour of Parliament House |
| 4.00pm-5.00pm | Meeting with Joint Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade chaired by Senator Ferguson. |

WEDNESDAY 5 NOVEMBER

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| 10.00am-11.30am | Viewing of Estimates: Defence (including Veterans' Affairs)
Senator Robert Hill
Followed by a debrief and discussion of what took place |
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- 12.30-1.30pm **Lunch** hosted by **Australian Timor-Leste Friendship Parliamentary Group**, facilitated by Marise Payne.
- 2.45-3.30pm Afternoon tea with an official visiting parliamentary delegation from **Brazil**.
- 4.30-5.30pm **Report writing** time

THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER

- 9.30am Delegation assemble in hotel lobby and are driven to Parliament House.
- 10.00am-11.30am **Viewing of Estimates: Foreign Affairs and Trade**
Senator Robert Hill
Followed by a discussion of what took place
- 12.00-1.30pm Lunch hosted by the **Joint Standing Committee on Treaties**
- 2.00-3.30pm Viewing of **Question Time in the Speaker's Gallery** at House of Representative followed by a discussion of what took place.
- 4.15-5.15pm **Report writing** time

FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER

- 10.15am Delegation to assemble in hotel lobby- check out of hotel and leave bags in the hotel's storage space for the day.
- 10.30am Delegation are transported to Parliament House, Main Entrance.
- 11.00am-12.30pm **Information session** at the **Department of the Parliamentary Library** on the research services and facilities available to parliamentary staff.
- 12.30-1.30pm Lunch
- 2.15pm Delegation drive to the **Department of Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade**
- 2.30-4.00 Delegation meet with the **Department of Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade** hosted by **Doug Foskett**.
possible items for discussion include the role of DFAT staff in relation to parliament, how does DFAT ensure its accountability to Parliament- methods, reporting, relationships etc
- 4.30-5.30pm **Report writing** time

6.30pm

Delegation taken from Rydges Hotel to Canberra airport by CBD transport.

8.10pm

Delegation depart Canberra for Wellington.