

## Interview with priest accused of sexually abusing children in Timor-Leste

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Daschbach in between the kids in Kutet, Oecusse.

*Photo by Tempo Timor.*

‘I never deny. I never confirm. I just say: no comment’

*By Tjitske Lingsma*

**Tempo Timor travelled to the hamlet of Kutet in Timor-Leste’s enclave Oecusse to interview defrocked priest Richard Daschbach, who is accused of sexually abusing minors. When asked whether he had touched children, Daschbach replied: ‘That’s my business, not yours.’**

The steep track to the mountain hamlet of Kutet resembles a riverbed with stones, slippery mud, deep tracks and big holes. For more than an hour the white four-wheel-drive grinds up the hill, rocking and wallowing, before reaching the isolated place which is home to Richard Daschbach. Five little boys are joining the defrocked priest when he walks to the tiny wooden stairs, that leads to his house made of a concrete fundament, bamboo walls and a roof of corrugated iron.

Daschbach (now 82 years old) agrees to talk to Tempo Timor. Just before the interview starts he takes a piece of betel nut. While he chews the stimulant drug, which gives a sense of alertness and well-being, red residue fills his mouth. Daschbach - wearing long blue trousers, a brown-grey-white polo-shirt and grey plastic Crocs - sits in a blue plastic chair in his one-room house which has books, little stuff, a stove, plastic cupboards and a big bed covered with a mosquito net. From behind his spectacles his blue eyes look straight at the interviewer.

Daschbach, who was born in the USA, came to West-Timor in 1966 as a parochial priest and settled in the mountains near Kefamenanu. After the Portuguese colonisers left Timor-Leste, he went to Oecusse. But it wouldn't be until 1990 before he permanently settled in Kutet. 'There is a special power that draws you to it,' he says, adding: 'There is a special appeal. The mountains. The people.' He had permission from his congregation Societas Verbi Divini (SVD, Society of the Divine Word) to create a retreat-house. But things would turn out differently. As always there were many children around and Daschbach decided to set up Topu Honis shelter home. 'It started organically, as children just came,' he tells Tempo Timor.

Topu Honis has two locations. Young children stay in Kutet, while the teenagers are in the coastal village of Mahata. According to the organisation's website, Topu Honis is 'a safe haven' for orphans, poor children, disabled adults and women fleeing abuse. It provides health care, food, schooling, 'shelter and safety', sponsorships for education and employment opportunities. Over the years 'hundreds and hundreds' of children stayed in Topu Honis, Daschbach explains. He can't give exact numbers as the shelter did not keep statistics. The organisation received substantial amounts of money from – foreign - donors. (In February 2018, for instance, the shelter received more than 100.000 US dollars.)

During the UN sponsored referendum in 1999, when the Timorese overwhelmingly voted for independence from Indonesia which had brutally occupied the country for 24 years, Topu Honis protected many refugees who were fleeing brutal attacks by militia and Indonesian military. Until they all had to leave the shelter fleeing further into the mountains to save their lives. Topu Honis was burned down. Daschbach was praised for his efforts to save refugees. The shelter was rebuilt some 200 meters further up the hill. Timor-Leste's Taur Matan Ruak, who was Falintil commander leader, army chief, president and is now prime minister, came 'several times' to pay his respect to the priest. Daschbach remembers that two boys who had lived in Kutet became Matan Ruak's bodyguards.

But then in February 2018 the SVD received allegations that Daschbach had sexually abused young children living in Kutet. The congregation's head in Rome ordered Fr. Yohanes Suban Gapun, SVD's regional superior in Timor-Leste, to go to Oecusse and take Daschbach to Dili. While the congregation investigated the case, the priest was suspended and forbidden to perform priestly celebrations. However, during the interview with Tempo Timor, Daschbach holds on to another version, insisting that he was in SVD's regional headquarters in Dili because he hadn't had a proper break for decades. 'I stayed there for six months as a vacation,' he says.

When asked about the investigations by his congregation into allegations of sexual abuse, he says: 'I don't know anything about that.' He also claims to have no memory of being taken to the national police to be heard by officers, despite the photos which were taken during one of these meetings. 'I don't remember that. I was too busy with other things,' he says.

During the interview Daschbach also chooses to discredit the generous Australian donor Tony Hamilton, who had told Tempo Timor that the former priest had confessed to him that he had been a paedophile all his life. 'That's the thing with talking to Tony. He drinks so much wine. He is a little tipsy sometimes,' smiles Daschbach, suggesting that Hamilton and another donor who was present 'misinterpreted what I said.'

Then in August 2018, without authorisation from his superiors, Daschbach left SVD premises in Dili to return to Kutet and to live in his current house near Topu Honis. 'I had decided in the beginning that I would be there (in Dili, TT) six months,' he says. 'It was time to leave and go back.'



Daschbach also decided to formally resign from his congregation and suggests he withdrew because of a conflict with SVD. 'They wanted their hands on Topu Honis,' he tells Tempo Timor. 'So I wrote a letter resigning from the SVD. So now they have no formal legal foothold in Topu Honis anymore, because I am no longer their member.' The break-up didn't affect him much. 'It was a small thing for me,' he says.

Then in November the Vatican decided to laicise the priest removing him from the status of being a member of the clergy because Daschbach had sexually abused children. About that decision Daschbach reacts with a general remark: 'Rules are rules. People are people.' When asked by Tempo Timor to explain his words, he responds: 'Rules are not people. People are not rules. I can't go any deeper than that.'

The Vatican defrocked Daschbach and the rights of a priest were taken away from him. But Daschbach himself sees that differently. 'Maybe. Nothing is clear,' he says. However, that statements is in contradictions with the fact that Daschbach himself signed the Vatican's documents stating he has been laicized. 'I never read documents. I just sign them,' responds Daschbach.

Daschbach insists he is not aware about the allegations that he sexually abused children. 'No. Of course not. If I was aware of it, I would not be here,' he responds without further elaborating. 'Just no comment,' is his answer to follow-up questions. This has also been his strategy with respect to previous allegations 'that I sleep around with local women.' He decided to pay no attention. 'You have to be thick skinned when you hear rumours.' His reaction has always been: 'I never deny, I never confirm, just no comment.'

But when Tempo Timor asks him whether he never touched children, he reacts irritated: 'That's my business, not yours.' Then Daschbach gets up from his chair and finishes the interview: 'We quit right now. That's enough.'

## "Ha'u nunka nega. Ha'u nunka konfirma. Ha'u so hateten de'it katak, ha'u laiha komentáriu"

By **Tempo Timor** March 08, 2019



*Hosi Tjitske Lingsma*

Tempo Timor hala'o viajen ba suku Kutet iha Rejiaun Administrativa Espesiál Oecusse Ambeno (RAEOA), hodi entrevista ho eis amu-lulik Richard Daschbach, ne'ebe hetan akuzasaun hodi halo abuzu seksuál ba labarik minoridade. Wainhira husu, karik nia hala'o abuzu ba labarik sira, Daschbach hatan katak "ne'e la'os ita boot nia preokupasaun, maibè ha'u nian."

Dalan ba Suku Kutet tenki hakur mota, sa'e foho, tahu ne'ebe namdoras, no estrada kuak barak. Liu oras ida kareta boot ne'e, sa'e ba iha foho ne'ebé ho fatuk barak, molok to'o ba iha fatin izoladu ida ne'ebé sai nu'udár uma ba Richard Daschbach. Labarik mane na'in lima mai ho nia, wainhira nia la'o mai iha eskada Ai ne'ebé liga ba iha nia uma ne'ebé ho fondasi halo hosi sementi no didin ho Au no kakuluk taka ho kalen.

Daschbach (agora ho idade 82) konkorda hodi ko'alia ho Tempo Timor. Molok entrevista ne'e hahú, nia lori bua ho malus ida. Bainhira nia mama bua no malus ne'e, hatudu sensu katak nia hatene no moris di'ak, kor mean nakonu iha nia ibun. Daschbach - hatais kalsa naruk kor-azul, kamizola polo ho kor malahuk ho plástiku malahuk ida, tur iha kadeira plástiku kor azul iha nia uma ida ne'ebé ho kuartu ida de'it, iha livru, no sasan kiik sira seluk, iha kama boot ne'ebé taka ho muskiteiru. Hosi nia lensa matan kor azul ne'e, hateke loos ba iha entrevistadór.

Daschbach, ne'ebé moris iha Estadus Unidus América, to'o iha Timor Osidental iha tinan 1966, nu'udár amu Pároko, iha parokia ida iha foho besik iha munisípiu Kefamenanu (Indonésia). Hafoin Koloniál Portugés sai husi Timor-Leste, Daschbach muda ba Oecusse. Maibé, ida ne'e to'o tinan 1990, molok nia hela permanente iha Kutet. Nia hateten "Iha podér espesiál ida ne'ebé mak foti ó, atu hakbesik ho ida-ne'e" nia mos akresenta "iha rekursu ida ne'ebé mak espesiál, Foho no Ema". Nia hetan autorizasaun hosi nia kongregasaun Societas Verbi Divini (SVD, Sosiedade sira kona-bá Maromak nia Liafuan) hodi harii uma retiru ida. Maibé, buat ne'e sai la hanesan. Hanesan baibain labarik barak no Daschbach deside atu estabelese Uma mahon Topu Honis. Nia hateten ba Tempo Timor ". Prosesu ne'e hahu ho la'o normál, bainhira labarik sira mesak mai rasik"

Topu Honis iha fatin rua. Labarik sira hela iha Kutet, no adolescente sira iha suku Mahata tasi-ibun. Tuir website hosi organizasaun ne'e katak, Topu Honis mak "Lalehan Seguru", ba oan ki'ak no adultu sira ne'ebé deficiente inklui feto<sup>ê</sup>sira ne'ebé hetan abuzu. Fornese saúde, aihan, eskola nu'udár fatin seguru, suporta edukasaun nomos kria oportunidade servisu. Daschbach hateten katak, durante tinan barak nia laran, labarik atus-ba-atus mak hela iha Topu Honis. Nia la fó número klaru koba-bá labarik hirak ne'e, tanba sira laiha lista. Organizasaun ne'e hetan suporta fundus hosi estranjeiru no doadores (nu'udár ezemplu iha fulan Feveireiru tinan 2018, uma mahon ne'e, hetan osan dolar Amerikanu \$100.000).

Durante UN patrosina referendu iha tinan 1999, bainhira Timor-Oan maioria vota ba independénsia, hosi okupasaun Indonésia, durante tinan 24 nia laran. Topu Honis proteze refujiadu barak ne'ebé mak halai hosi hahalok brutal milísia no militar Indonésia. To'o sira hotu halai ba iha ai-laran, hodi salva sira nia moris. Uma mahon Topu Honis hetan sunu hotu.

Daschbach hetan rekoñesimentu, tanba bele salva refujiadu sira. Uma mahon ne'e konstrui fila-fali metro 200, sa'e tan ba foho leten. Taur Matan Ruak ne'ebé nu'udár eis-komandante Falintil, Xefi Armada nomos asumi kargu hanesan Prezidente República no agora dau-daun nu'udár Primeiru Ministru, iha VIII Governu Konstitusional, dalaruma hala'o vizita ba fatin ne'e, nu'udár símbolu respeito ba Amu-lulik Daschbach no hodi hanoin fila-fali katak, labarik mane na'in rua, ne'ebé hela iha Kutet, agora dau-daun sai nu'udár seguransa pesoál ba Taur Matan Ruak.

Maibé, iha fulan Feveireiru tinan 2018 SVD, simu alegasaun hirak ne'e katak, Daschbach halo ona abuzu seksuál, ba labarik ne'ebé moris iha Kutet. Nai-ulun ba kongregasaun iha Roma, haruka Fr. Yohanes Suban Gapun, superior SVD ba rejiaun ida ne'e, iha Timor-Leste, hodi bá Oecusse no foti Daschbach bá Díli.

Enkuantu kongregasaun investiga kazu ne'e, Amu-lulik suspende tiha no hetan bandu atu hala'o misa ka atividade igreja. Maski nune'e, durante entrevista ho Tempo Timor, Daschbach hato'o versaun seluk no insisti katak, nia mai iha SDV Díli, tamba durante tinan barak ona, nia seidak iha loron deskansa ne'ebé dí'ak, "Hau hela iha Ne'ebá durante fulan 6 hanesan feriadu" nia hateten.

Bainhira husu kona-bá, investigasaun hosi nia kongregasaun ba alegasaun kona-bá abuzu seksuál, nia hatete: 'Ha'u la hatene buat ida, kona-bá ne'e.' Nia mós reklama la lembra kona-bá polísia nasional, ne'ebé lori nia, hodi hato'o nia deklarasaun, maski iha fotografia sira ne'ebé, mak hasai durante sorumutu hirak ne'e. "Ha'u la hanoin hetan ida ne'e. Ha'u okupadu ho buat seluk", nia hatete.

Durante entrevista Daschbach mós hili, atu hafo'er doadór Austrália jeneroza Tony Hamilton, ne'ebé informa ba Tempo Timor katak, eis-Amu-lulik ne'e sai ona pedofilia, iha ninia moris tomak. "Ida ne'e mak kuandu ko'alia ho Tony. Nia hemu tua barak demais. Dala ruma nia lanu oituan" Daschbach hateten ho hamnasa, hodi sujere katak, Hamilton no doador seluk ne'ebé mai "la akapta ho dí'ak saida mak ha'u hateten."

Iha fulan Agustu tinan 2018, sem autorizasaun hosi nia superiór, Daschbach husik ofisina SVD iha Díli, hodi fila hikas ba Kutet no hela iha nia uma Topu Honis. Nia hatete: "Ha'u decide antes ona katak, ha'u sei ba (iha Díli, TT) fulan neen nia laran". "Tempu ona hodi fila-fali mai iha ne'e"

Daschbach mós decide, atu formalmente rezigna-aan husi nia kongregasaun no hateten katak, nia sai tanba iha konfliktu ho SVD. Nia hatete ba Tempo Timor "Sira hakarak sira mós involve iha Topu Honis". "Tan ne'e, ha'u hakerek karta, hodi rezigna-aan hosi SVD. Tanba ne'e agora sira laiha tan poder legál iha Topu Honis, tanba ha'u la'os sira nia membru ona". Fahe malu ida ne'e, laiha impaktu maka'as ba nia. "Ida ne'e hanesan buat kiik-oan ida ba ha'u".

Iha fulan Novembru, Vatikanu decide, atu hasai Amu-lulik nu'udár membru relijiozu, tanba Daschbach hala'o abuzu seksuál ba labarik sira.

Relasiona ho desizaun ne'e, reasaun Daschbach mak "Regras ne'e regras. Ema ne'e ema" wainhira Tempo Timor husu atu esplika signifika hosi nia liafuan ne'e, nia hatan katak "Regras la'os ema. Ema la'os regras. Ha'u labele esplika liu ida ne'e"

Vatikanu hasai ona Daschbach no ninia direitu, kona-bá Amu-lulik, maibé, Daschbach nia haree oinseluk. "Dala ruma, Laiha buat ida mak klaru", nia hatete. Maibé deklarasaun ida ne'e, kontráriu ho faktus ne'ebé hatudu katak, Daschbach rasik asina dokumentu Vatikanu ne'ebé hateten katak, hasai ona nia. Daschbach hatan "Ha'u nunca lee dokumentus.

### "Ha'u asina de'it"

Daschbach insiste nia la hatene kona-bá alegasaun hirak ne'e katak, nia halo abuzu seksuál ba labarik sira. "Lae. Klaru katak lae. Se ha'u hatene ida-ne'e, ha'u sei la hela tan iha ne'e", nia hatán no la elobara tan resposta ruma. No "Laiha komentáriu" mak nia hodi resposta ba pergunta sira tuir mai. Ida ne'e, mak sai nu'udár nia estratejia, ba alegasaun molok ne'e katak, "ha'u toba ba mai ho feto sira ne'ebé besik iha área refere". Nia decide hodi la fó atensaun ba ida ne'e. "O tenki kulit mahar wainhira rona rumores" Nia reasaun mak sempre "Ha'u nunca nega. Hau nunca konfirma. Laiha komentáriu de'it"

Maibé, bainhira Tempo Timor husu, karik nia la book ka la kaer ona labarik sira ne'e?, nia hatan ho hirus katak "Ne'e ha'u nia privadu, la'os o nian". Nune'e Daschbach hamrik hosi nia kadeira no hakotu entrevista ne'e, hodi dehan "Ita tenki para ona "Entrevista" agora. Ida ne'e to'o ona"