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PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
DEFENCE AND TRADE

Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste

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PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

Monday, 17 June 2013

Members in attendance: Senators Moore and Mr Champion, Mr Griffin, Mr Marles, Mr Ruddock, Ms Saffin, Dr Stone.

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste, with special emphasis on:

- bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government levels;
- aid, including support with governance issues;
- economic issues, including trade and investment;
- cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges;
- people to people links; and
- defence cooperation and those aspects of regional security that affect Timor-Leste.

The Committee will consider both the current situation and opportunities for the future.

WITNESSES

LEAHY, Mr Peter, Principal Executive, International Programs, CARE Australia 1
NEWTON-HOWES, Dr Julia, Chief Executive Officer, CARE Australia..... 1

LEAHY, Mr Peter, Principal Executive, International Programs, CARE Australia

NEWTON-HOWES, Dr Julia, Chief Executive Officer, CARE Australia

Committee met at 17:38

CHAIR (Mr Champion): The committee will now resume taking evidence as part of its inquiry into the Australian relationship with Timor Leste. Before commencing the hearing, I refer any members of the media who may be observing to the need to reporting fairly and accurately proceedings of the committee as required by the Senate order concerning the broadcast of Senate and committee proceedings.

CHAIR: I welcome the witnesses . Before we proceed to questions, do you wish to make a short opening statement before the committee?

Dr Newton-Howes: Yes, please. What I thought I would do is just briefly give some information about CARE Australia and highlight a couple of points out of our submission.

CHAIR: We will have to suspend the hearing because we have a division.

Proceedings suspended from 17:39 to 17:50

CHAIR: We will resume now with your opening statements.

Dr Newton-Howes: CARE International is one of the largest humanitarian and aid agencies globally. We are present in over 80 countries around the world. CARE Australia is currently programming Australian funding in 24 countries. On behalf of the CARE International family, we manage a number of the officers in this region. In fact, the CARE office in East Timor is managed directly by CARE Australia. Our mission is to address global poverty, and we have a particular focus on the needs and concerns of women and girls because we recognise that women are both overrepresented in poverty, but also it is clear that there are strong linkages between poverty and discrimination. The status of women in many countries is one of the reasons they are overrepresented in poverty, so unless we can address the low status of women, then we will not be able to overcome global poverty. Let me just say a few things about CARE's program in East Timor. Our current program in East Timor is around \$6 million this year, and, of that, about \$1.2 million is raised from Australian sources. About 22 per cent of our funding in East Timor from Australian sources. That is both AusAID and Australian private funding that we have raised.

Mr RUDDOCK: Your program?

Dr Newton-Howes: CARE Australia's program is about \$6.2 million and about \$1.2 million of that is Australian sourced funding. The other funding comes through other CARE members. For example, the European Union and US are the major funders of our program.

Dr STONE: US and who was the other one?

Dr Newton-Howes: The US and the EU. In our program we are working in education, health and nutrition, rural livelihoods particularly with a focus on food, and rural infrastructure but that is mainly rural roads and a small amount of water supply. The three points I would like to really draw on based on our submission are that we believe that the Australian NGOs such as CARE Australia can add real value to Australia's aid effort in Timor-Leste. We are the experts and we work directly with very poor communities. We are the experts on what poverty looks like in very poor communities, in the ways of overcoming extreme poverty and we believe that a stronger relationship with Australia's aid program and Australian NGOs would really enhance the extent to which the aid program is meeting its overarching objective of helping poor people overcome poverty. The ways in which we think that that should work is by a very deliberate strategy through the aid program of integrating community actors, particularly Australian NGOs. We also bring people-to-people links and we think that clearly the geography is important to that into Australia's aid program. Specific funding windows for Australian NGOs have been very effective in other countries but they have not existed, despite significant lobbying, in the program to Timor-Leste.

The second point that I would like to highlight from my submission is the one about the face of poverty in Timor and the importance of smallholder agriculture to overcoming poverty and malnutrition. About 80 per cent of families in Timor-Leste rely on food that they grow themselves, so subsistence agriculture is a major part of the livelihoods and survival of the people in Timor-Leste. AusAID has funded the Seeds of Life program, which we think has been very successful. CARE with funding from the European Union has helped to take that out to thousands of families in Bobonaro, Ainaro and Oecusse, the western parts of Timor. Seeds of Life focuses on the staple crops, maize, rice and so forth, but to overcome malnutrition families also need to understand issues that underline malnutrition and so the program that we have taken out combines increasing the staple crops also with kitchen gardens and encouraging women farmers, because women have most of the responsibility for feeding the

families. So it is ensuring that agricultural extension work gets to women, that it is not only about increasing the staple crop but understanding that for healthy children they need access to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables as well as protein and fats in their diets. So we think that a greater emphasis on rural livelihoods is absolutely essential to overcoming extreme poverty.

The final point I would just like to emphasise, which in retrospect we did not make nearly enough of in our submission, is the situation of women in Timor-Leste and really the strong issues of gender inequality. Although there is relatively good representation of women in the parliament of Timor-Leste, actually at lower levels of government, in village and district governance, women are really underrepresented. Traditional norms in Timor really see women as the property of men, either their father's, their husband's, their brother's. I would say that the submission from the International Women's Development Agency made some really good points about how Australia's aid program could more comprehensively address the chronic situation of gender inequality in Timor-Leste, and I think this is something that really deserves a greater level of support and recognition in Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste.

CHAIR: Excellent. I just have one question.? I have long thought that agriculture and improving that aspect of things is the first step in doing a whole lot of things for these communities. Do you think we have got the balance right in the amount of resources we are giving to things like Seeds for Life and improving the storage of food over there as well? Or do you think we should do more?

Dr Newton-Howes: I think a much greater part of our program should be focused on nutrition and food through agriculture and through support—

CHAIR: Sorry, the whole program?

Dr Newton-Howes: No, a much greater part of Australia's aid program should be focused on food and nutrition in smallholder agriculture in East Timor. The Seeds of Life program has reached a significant number. I met, last time I was in East Timor, with the head of that program and actually it is still quite a small percentage of the overall—I mean, there is not yet planning to reach that program across the whole of East Timor although it is still a relatively small country. I think we should be aiming to take it out nationwide and it should be combined, as I said, with other agricultural techniques. So to overcome poverty in East Timor, the issue of hunger and malnutrition should receive the greatest emphasis in our program.

CHAIR: I know Dr Stone has a question or two for you.

Dr STONE: Yes. It makes me sad to hear about the malnutrition, because my own electorate had, for two years running, \$100 million worth of food, such as fruit that could not be sold, thrown away rather than given away. It is just ridiculous, isn't it. I understand, of course, the development of agriculture as significant, but it is a stupid situation. You said that Australia's aid program should more comprehensively address women's inequality. So how are you proposing Australia's aid should be better focused to address women's inequality?

Dr Newton-Howes: In all aspects of AusAID's programming there should be a gender analysis to see how a particular program addresses women's and men's needs—they are often different and separate, and need to be. AusAID is not systematically undertaking an assessment of the gendered impacts of their work, and their own assessment suggests that their monitoring and evaluation do not adequately capture the different impacts on men and women. So that would be a start, but they need a much more deliberate strategy to understand how they are working with men and women.

AusAID is funding some rural roads programs, for example, and apparently about 25 per cent of the workers on those roads are women. We also do rural road building, and about 50 per cent of our workers are women and that is because we are deliberately targeting them. We know that, when women get access to the small wages they earn, and to the training, that money disproportionately benefits the family compared to the wages earned by men. So they clearly, even in that—

Mr RUDDOCK: So did they build roads better?

Dr Newton-Howes: Well, we did surveys—

Mr RUDDOCK: I am only asking in qualitative terms.

Dr Newton-Howes: We surveyed the headman who was leading the road building gang afterwards. In the first set of these programs the men who were managing the teams were very reluctant to take on women, but when we surveyed them afterwards they said, 'Actually, the women were more conscientious in the way they mixed the cement and formed the culverts than the men, and they were just as good at the hard physical work.' So I think, on balance, there is probably little difference in the roads that are built, and one could easily aim for 50 per cent

women. There are very few employment prospects out in these rural areas, so enabling that sort of thing is important.

But we also think that there needs to be a lot of grassroots work to change attitudes. Clearly these are embedded cultural norms, but we know from our experience here in Australia that these things can change quite rapidly when attention is paid to them. So we would also like to see that—

Mr RUDDOCK: I did not know that our women were out campaigning after road building jobs!

Dr Newton-Howes: Oh they have—

CHAIR: Don't bite! **And you restrain yourself**, Mr Ruddock. Dr Stone has not finished.

Dr STONE: No, I have not. Had you finished your remarks there?

Dr Newton-Howes: Yes.

Dr STONE: You also said that the low status of women leads to their poverty. To what extent is that status embedded in the culture, as you say, as just a fact—that women are born inferior to men—a bit like a PNG society? Or to what extent, in your observation, is it to do with women? They are, as you say, the major breadwinners—the major workers in the food production. But they are also mostly pregnant, mostly trying to breastfeed or to grow up a huge family. There, as we know, there is one of the biggest numbers of children per woman in our region. So to what extent are you addressing the issues of family planning, to try to give women some spacing with their children? What resistance are you meeting in that, if you are? And to what extent do you think this is biological determinism—the women having these huge families when they are malnourished and stunted and, on the other hand, supposed or relied upon to be the breadwinners, pretty much?

Dr Newton-Howes: I think my answer will be somewhat simplistic, because these things are always really complicated. It is a social cultural norm. We think, and there is a lot of anthropological evidence, that the existence of bride price in Timor is a key factor in women being seen as belonging to first their father and then their husband and, therefore, in men feeling, 'I bought you and, therefore, if I hit you and I tell you to work harder that is my legitimate role.' There are those sorts of cultural norms that are able to be addressed over time.

The issue of access to sexual and reproductive health services is a major issue. We have had a number of discussions with the Ministry of Health. Clearly, given the fact that it is a predominantly Catholic country, there is a range of views about access to family planning. I believe that AusAID is funding Marie Stopes to do some work in East Timor. I think that is really useful. We have done a small amount of work in East Timor, but a lot of work in other countries, around changing cultural attitudes to family planning through the recognition—exactly as you said—of the health values of spacing children in families.

This is an area where those two problems are bound together, and there is a range of other factors that really contribute to the low status of women. But we have seen in some really difficult contexts, including the Rohingya in Myanmar, how over a 10-year period the status of women can change really dramatically when you specifically and explicitly seek to address it.

Senator MOORE: A lot of your submission talked about this relationship between AusAID as a provider and the East Timorese government in a bilateral arrangement and the role of NGOs. The submission indicates that you think it could be done a lot better. The way it has evolved is probably a bit of an historical thing but, in terms of the bilateral arrangement, is East Timor different to other areas in which you are working? My understanding was that AusAID is moving much more into these bilateral arrangements everywhere, which sounds good, but I am not sure whether it really links into the network as you explain. Is it much different to your work in other areas?

Dr Newton-Howes: One of the things that I think is fascinating is that, close to home, AusAID is much less willing to work through NGOs than it is when far away from home.

Senator MOORE: Like PNG and East Timor.

Dr Newton-Howes: In Africa there is a lot of funding as a proportion of the overall program for NGOs. But close to home it is clearly a desire, and a very sensible desire, to have a strong bilateral relationship. It is much more government-to-government. We do everything through the government department, as opposed to recognising that the outcome of strong development is capable government, a strong private sector and a vibrant civil society, and the aid program legitimately can address all those things.

Areas where we feel there has been good integration between the bilateral program and NGOs are where there have been specific windows, and the Mekong countries are good examples of that where, in the past, AusAID has said, 'We're working in water supply in Vietnam and we'll do the big stuff bilaterally, but we want you to come in and do the community water supply.' Through that, we will work across the whole spectrum of issues from more

capable government through to changing community attitudes and ensuring that that work supports the poor people and does not just get blocked in government departments.

Also, at different times, AusAID has committed, including in its current strategy, to working through NGOs, but somehow it has not come to have effect. In AusAID's submission it points out that about \$9 million of aid is going through NGOs. That goes through a program called the ANCP, which is core funding to NGOs which we can then allocate to programs we want to do. That is terrific funding, and we are spending some of it in East Timor, but it is not a deliberate strategy to link their work in, say, education to work that NGOs are better suited to do at a grassroots level in education. Too much of their work in education is linked directly and only with the ministry, and it is not taking that down to the communities in a way where NGOs empower communities and enhance the quality of the work that has to happen at a ministry level.

Senator MOORE: Would some of that then be expected, from AusAID's perspective, to be done with the Timor-Leste government so that if they come up with an arrangement—that this amount of money will go to education, for instance—the Timor-Leste government would then, knowing its own capacity, look at the available people on the ground? Timor-Leste is full of NGOs. Even though your submission did say that a few have gone, there are still very many working in the field over there. So is it your understanding of the AusAID proposal that the bilateral arrangement would then enhance that relationship between the Timor-Leste government and their NGOs rather than go straight from AusAID to the NGO?

Dr Newton-Howes: I probably should not speak for AusAID. I am not aware that they have had those sorts of negotiations with the ministries, but I think that I will avoid speaking for them, because I am not really sure.

Senator MOORE: That was not what were you told.

Dr Newton-Howes: Yes.

Senator MOORE: In your submission, you look at things that you like and that have worked well. Speaking of education, you look at the *Lafaek* process, which draws out a lot of the issues, doesn't it? There is that one vignette that something was there working and had to stop, and now you are attempting to restart it. Between the time of the submission and now, have you had any word from AusAID about that program?

Dr Newton-Howes: Yes, and it has been very disappointing. *Lafaek* was a very large endeavour. We were getting three age-appropriate additions of *Lafaek* out to every schoolchild in East Timor four times a year to support the curriculum. There were teachers' aides and all sorts of things. So, even when it stopped, that was costing something like \$1.2 million a year. AusAID have come back to us and said that they have some very complex contracting arrangement but they have around half a million dollars a year for it. Think of the number of magazines we are putting out. The maths do not add up. We are actually, at the moment, trying to look for other sources of funding for *Lafaek*.

Senator MOORE: Within the CARE family?

Dr Newton-Howes: We are also looking to a private donor in Australia who might be able to provide some additional resources.

Senator MOORE: This is my last question. In terms of capacity, you talk a lot about the NGOs and the fact that there are locally based and international ones who work together. What is the capacity level of the local NGOs in terms of their ability to develop, because so many sprang up so quickly? You did name the core ones whose names we know, but there are many more. From your understanding and working cooperatively on the ground, what is the capacity of the NGOs and what do they need to do their job better?

Dr Newton-Howes: It is very mixed. There are some really strong ones and there are, as you know, an enormous number of NGOs. Increasingly, we are partnering with them and supporting their development. I think AusAID's water supply project, which did a lot of work to strengthen local civil society, was a good example of improving the technical capacity of those NGOs. So it is continuing to grow over time. There are some really impressive NGOs, and then there are a lot that are really struggling and struggling for funding. So that is a mixed picture. In the long run, we would like CARE Timor-Leste to be an indigenous NGO and be recognised as a—is indigenous the right word?—Timorese NGO. At the moment it is managed through CARE Australia but, just as the Salvation Army originated overseas but is now seen clearly as an important part of Australian civil society—

Mr RUDDOCK: Is that not what organisations like World Vision, Save the Children and so on have done?

Dr Newton-Howes: World Vision has localised most of their offices around the world. Others are looking into it.

Mr RUDDOCK: Does localising mean 'employ local staff' or does it mean something else?

Dr Newton-Howes: We have a local board of directors instead of, as currently, the CARE Timor-Leste office is directly managed by staff in my office, and our board of directors is responsible for their operation, but it is about increasingly localised positions and we are doing that reasonably successfully. We are able, increasingly, to hire Timorese and, as you might have seen in our submission, we also lose staff who then enter into eminent positions in the government. So it is more about localising positions and then, in the longer term, developing a board.

Mr Leahy: A nationally registered independent organisation would be the end.

Senator MOORE: Where else does that happen? In countries where aid is received, where have we got independent CARE establishments?

Dr Newton-Howes: In Thailand, India and Peru.

Mr RUDDOCK: That is CARE?

Dr Newton-Howes: That is for CARE. World Vision has just gone big bang, I understand, with local boards.

Mr RUDDOCK: I will just read you this: 'Development assistance is delivered under a strategic planning agreement for the development of the government of Timor-Leste and the government of Australia 2011 and is based on priorities and targets identified by the government of Timor-Leste in its strategic development plan of 2012-2030.' What you are really suggesting is that we should now abandon the targets identified by Timor-Leste in its strategic development plan?

Dr Newton-Howes: No, I am not suggesting that at all. Clearly, what the Australian government agreed to take out of Timor's development plan was a process of negotiation of what Australia would do and what it did not want to do. Australia's aid program is always a process of negotiation. I think there is plenty of evidence in the literature of development going back 30 years that points to the important role of civil society and enhancing the role of communities, not simply working through government but with government for effective aid. This government has made a really commendable and strong commitment to effective aid in order to deliver on that. When they choose targets in the education sector, or the health sector, or on issues like hunger and poverty you have to engage civil society in delivering effective outcomes in those areas. Particularly in countries with weak bureaucracies you will get effective outcomes only through working through weak bureaucracies.

Mr RUDDOCK: I will ask for some evidence in relation to that, but I go back to the point I made initially. I do not know these details, I assume you do. Development assistance is delivered under a strategic planning agreement for the development between the government of Timor-Leste and the government of Australia. Is it an agreement for a year, or is the agreement year on year?

Dr Newton-Howes: No, it is a multiyear agreement.

Mr RUDDOCK: So, how do you vary it?

Dr Newton-Howes: It has targets in things like education and health. In terms of negotiating those targets and how they will be met and delivered on, is about recognising the different actors.

Mr RUDDOCK: I am asking myself the question: how do we, in a report, suggest that these things should be delivered? Are we suggesting that it should no longer be under, essentially, the country itself determining what its priorities should be?

Mr Leahy: CARE also works within the overall national planning frameworks of the countries in which we operate. We support the priorities of the Timor-Leste government with respect to their authorisation of our work in country. We seek to complement and support the development priorities of the Timor-Leste government, just as the Australian government does.

The question really is around the mechanics of how those targets and priorities are addressed. The example that was put up before around rural water and sanitation program that AusAID has been supporting in cooperation with the Timor-Leste government has involved a significant component of civil society engagement and has been highlighted as a success in that program. I contrast that to much of the effort that the Australian aid program has made over the past decade or more in legitimately attempting to strengthen the institutions of government and the machinery of governance. It is a question of tactics as opposed to strategy.

Mr RUDDOCK: How we address it in our report in terms of different priorities is where I am going to head with the rest of my questions when I come back.

Mr Leahy: One of the things that AusAID is currently doing is a review of its engagement with civil society in the aid program, and I think we referenced that in our submission.

Mr RUDDOCK: I better have a look at it. I ask myself this question: how do I make a judgement that care, as against World Vision, as against somebody else, is going to be able to be the most effective provider in terms of not only sensitivity and so on, but also in terms of giving value for the dollar. If it were a government project you would put it out for tender. Maybe we should.

Dr STONE: AusAID is about the tender. It says that we want somebody to manage a water sanitation project and either decides to contract the government in question, or says what NGO might like to partner with us and deliver that. Then you have a set of criteria and you look at their previous performances in like-minded projects. There is a rational process of deciding who should get it. In terms of corruption or moneys Australia commits going astray, other than to the project, do you think there is any difference—and this might be a bit sensitive to ask this question—where we have committed funds to, say, a public works department in Timor-Leste versus giving it to an NGO to manage, is it possible to say that one is more likely to have every dollar hit the ground running versus being hived off to not the core business of the project.

Dr Newton-Howes: I think AusAID can support through budget support, which is directly giving money through the same government systems, or they can hire a commercial contractor, or they can choose, through a selection process, an NGO. I think AusAID would keep good data on levels of corruption. I know that in general, although NGOs sometimes lose small amounts of money through fraud, they tend to be very small amounts of money. CARE Australia manages a \$60 million program, and we have very good financial management right down to the local level. Clearly, the capacity to deal with and influence the public financial management in East Timor is more complex. In hiring a commercial contractor they would expect to hire someone with really strong financial management capacities. The issue of corruption in AusAID is really quite small, and the greater risk is that money is poorly spent, as opposed to taken corruptly, but I am sure you know the statistics.

Mr RUDDOCK: Can I just go back to where I was, because I am not familiar with these issues, and I am trying to get myself up to speed. For some reason or another I was not able to participate in some of the other hearings where I might have focused on these issues. I am interested in how you evaluate and in how AusAID would evaluate various agencies that offer to deliver their services. Sharman says they put it out to a form of tender process, invite expressions of interest and then look at previous performance and so on. Do they evaluate them afterwards—

Dr STONE: Yes, very comprehensively.

Mr RUDDOCK: to see whether or not they have got value for money? I just want to be satisfied that when we spend money it produces the outcome that we are expecting.

Dr STONE: Some of our NGOs complain about the onerous requirements of the acquitting.

CHAIR: This is your opportunity, Mr—

Mr Leahy: No, I have had plenty of other opportunities to do that. It is a question partly of being fit for purpose. NGOs do some things well; contractors do other things well. Budget support through a government, using government systems, also has its own benefits. There are risks associated with each of those different approaches as well and AusAID, in designing an initiative, generally thinks very clearly about which of the options is the best value. Then we will put in place a process, usually a competitive one, to ensure they get value for money in selecting the specific provider as opposed to the type of provider. So there are usually a number of levels of analysis that go on in the agency: firstly to determine which of the options—or a combination of the options—might be best, and then to choose specific organisations to implement. In some cases there may only be one organisation. If you are looking at doing a program relating to labour standards, for example, you would probably choose to work with the ILO if it is working at a government level. But, if you are looking to do a community based activity, you are most likely to think about engaging with civil society organisations or NGOs. They are just rules of thumb—they are not necessarily the case—but some analysis is always done by the agency to determine which players they will engage.

Dr Newton-Howes: AusAID would receive regular monitoring reports from us when we work on AusAID programs and there would usually be a mid-term review where they make an assessment of whether we were on track with progress and so forth, and then it is normal practice to do an evaluation at the end of a significant program.

Mr RUDDOCK: Your submission produces information designed to support recommendation 1:

In order to meet the Australian Aid program's fundamental purpose "to help people overcome poverty", the Timor-Leste bilateral program must pay particular attention to widespread and entrenched rural poverty.

Then I think there were some statistics which I observed a little earlier about the situation. I was going to quote some other data that had come to my attention, which said: 'Nevertheless, the UN reports that poverty in Timor-

Leste is decreasing. For instance, in 2005 life expectancy at birth had increased by two years, primary school enrolments had jumped from 63 per cent to 90 per cent, and the country is forecast to virtually eliminate adult poverty by 2015.' They seem to be very positive comments and I wondered why, if there is such meaningful change occurring, there was the emphasis that you were placing. Are you arguing there should be more aid into Timor-Leste or that it should be less in comparison to other countries? I just do not know about where we are with the priority in relation to these matters.

Dr Newton-Howes: It is true that since independence, and particularly since the devastation that occurred in 1999, Timor has made huge strides. Things like primary education are really good examples of that. However, 80 per cent of Timorese rely on food that they grow themselves. I think the suggestion that Timor will overcome extreme poverty by 2015 is one that is based on the government increasingly being able to make welfare payments, as opposed to people having the opportunity to get a job or improve their own living standards through improved farming techniques and so forth.

As we know, welfare payments play a role in extreme poverty but people never get the opportunity beyond welfare. That is why the work on rural infrastructure and the work on improving smallholder agriculture, as well as good suggestions around how we create jobs in Timor, is important. But travelling around the remote western villages in Timor, where I have spent a bit of time, extreme poverty is linked: these people walk for two hours to get to a market, there are really poor roads and we still have massively high malnutrition rates.

So, yes, there has been progress on primary education, but I think that I would not be that optimistic about the leap to overcoming extreme poverty by 2015.

Ms SAFFIN: No-one here said optimistic.

CHAIR: Well, Mr Ruddock, you may be party to a report that would suggest that we are. Anyway, well I think we might be straining to—

Mr RUDDOCK: Is your own organisation on the ground—I was almost going to interrupt when you were giving your initial report—run from here? I mean, what are you in East Timor?

Dr Newton-Howes: We are actually one of the largest, if not the largest—certainly a couple of years ago we were the largest—international NGO present in East Timor. We operated in every district when we were managing the *Lafaek* magazine, but now since we are not able to do that nationally we are really focused on the western areas. We have 11 ex-patriot staff and 227 local staff. We have an office in Dili, and an office in Maliana and we have an office in Liquica—

Mr Leahy: I think we operate in 10 of the 13 districts.

Dr Newton-Howes: So we are a very significant presence.

Ms SAFFIN: Just one question. In the submission—

Mr Leahy: Sorry, that is five of the 13 districts. My mistake.

Ms SAFFIN: Five?

Dr Newton-Howes: Five of 13 districts. Yes.

Ms SAFFIN: In the submission you talk about the challenges on sensitive issues, but I know that on the ground, as difficult as it is,—and they are—they are progressing in a way with the society coming out of transition. So it is not out of step with how things happen, and it is not out of step with a country that has had military occupation for a long time, to start to address some of those issues. And even though they are really incomplete—like the victims support unit with the police and the domestic violence law, and a whole range of things—I probably characterise it a little bit differently to how you do in the submission. And as hard as it is in all of those things—even abortion—those issues have been discussed quite freely.

Dr Newton-Howes: Yes.

Ms SAFFIN: With family planning also, leaders have taken a lead on it and all the local radio. So I suppose I do not accept that it is that hard that those issues are there. I do accept what you said about the gender; it would be good if there were a gender stocktake done on all programs—through AusAID. They have that mechanism, that tool.

Dr Newton-Howes: I think if you felt that we were suggesting that they were too hard to tackle then we did not write that terribly well, because we do believe these issues should be tackled. But we recognise that they are sensitive ones. We do get some pushback from, for example, the ministry of health around contraception. But that does not mean you do not keep talking about it. I absolutely agree.

CHAIR: Okay. Thank you for your attendance here today. If there are matters that we might need additional information on, the secretariat will write to you, and also send you a copy of the transcript of your evidence to which you can make any necessary corrections—errors of transcription. Hansard may or may not wish to talk to you just to clarify bits of your evidence. Other than that, thank you very much for your attendance here today.

I now adjourn the hearing.

Resolved (on motion by Ms Saffin):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 18:35