

AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA

Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, at the opening of the Australia-Indonesia Seminar, Canberra, 26 May 1989.

Ten years ago, the first Australia-Indonesia Seminar was held on this ANU campus. That seminar launched what has become a valuable regular vehicle for an informal but serious exchange of views on the many facets of Australia-Indonesia relations. By bringing together a wide range of participants - from the private sector, academe, the media and other fields - these seminars have contributed to the assessment of enduring interests in the relationship, as well as continuing to offer fresh perspectives on it.

Exercises like this play an important part in the ongoing process of expanding each country's knowledge of the other. I have remarked on several occasions that no two neighbours anywhere in the world are as different, in terms of history, culture, population, language, and political and social traditions, as Australia and Indonesia.

These differences place a special burden - and a particular obligation - on each of us to make the effort to understand one another, not just at the government to government level, but also at the broader cultural and social levels. I am therefore particularly pleased to see at this seminar some new and younger faces willing to apply themselves to this challenge, and to join the older hands among you who have contributed so much over the years to communication between our two nations

The constituency of Australians and Indonesians who know and understand their neighbouring country is in each country lamentably small, and each of us needs to work on this. From the Australian end, I believe that the newly established Australia Indonesia Institute - the membership

of which I recently announced - can make a contribution to increasing our knowledge of each other, and to widening that small constituency to which I referred. The basic purpose of the Institute is to help add breadth, depth and vigour to our long-term relations, and in particular to help broaden the base of people-to-people contacts between our two communities - not least contacts between journalists.

The Australian Government obviously attaches importance to the maintenance of a constructive, friendly and co-operative relationship with Indonesia, and we are very conscious of how volatile that relationship has tended to be in the past. The agenda that Foreign Minister Alatas and I have set since we found ourselves both coming new to our

jobs last year is to add some stabilising ballast to our relations - ballast in the form of increased trade and economic co-operation; increased exchanges of tourists, academics and students; and increased political co-operation both bilaterally and multilaterally.

What both Governments are seeking now, as both of us have now said on many different occasions in many different ways, is an approach focused not on constantly self-consciously taking the temperature of the relationship, but rather getting on with the task of building it, area by area, paying particular attention to identifying practical mutual interests and areas of practical mutual benefit.

To start with, Mr Alatas and I have given the relationship a new institutional framework, including the establishment of a regular Australia-Indonesia Ministerial Meeting and reinstated annual senior officials talks. This will enable us jointly to review overall developments in order to ensure the co-operative management of relations between the two countries, and means that we should be better able to both anticipate problems before they become significant, and when problems do occur - as they inevitably will from time to time between any neighbours - better able to address and solve them (as, eg, we have been doing with the recent talks on fishing).

We have also recognised that, while it is easy enough in the light of history to dwell on the differences and on the importance of sensible political management of the problem areas in our relations, we should never lose sight of the fact that on several fundamental issues, Australia and Indonesia share common interests and a common outlook.

Australia and Indonesia hold similar views on a great many international and security questions. We both - Australia as a member of the Western alliance, and Indonesia as a leading voice of non-alignment - seek to promote stability in our common region, as evidenced by our active interest in a Cambodian settlement. Under President Soeharto, Indonesia has made a significant contribution to regional order in South East Asia, of which ASEAN is the centrepiece.

Australia regards Indonesia as a valuable security partner. Indonesia's security and stability is central to the stability of the region as a whole. As neighbours, we need to do more to nurture a sense of the community of strategic interest between us. We would benefit from maintaining an open and constructive dialogue on our common strategic environment, particularly at a time when fundamental shifts in east-west relations, and the growing strength of regional players, combine to increase the fluidity of that environment.

There is also scope for more regular and extensive consultations and exchanges between Australian Defence Force personnel and their Indonesian Armed Forces counterparts. In this context, we welcome the resumption of high-level defence contacts with the visit of the Australian Chief of Defence Force, General Gration, to Indonesia last November, and

the planned visit of the Indonesian Armed Forces Commander, General Try Sutrisno, to Australia later this year.

We both have economies going through a period of major restructuring. We both seek to integrate our national economies more fully with the dynamic economies of the Asia/Pacific region. Indonesia has taken a keen and encouraging interest in the Australian initiative on greater regional economic co-operation, and we look forward to working closely with you as the proposal takes shape.

Already we can record sound progress in several areas of the practical economic agenda we have established. Negotiations for a comprehensive agreement on the Timor Gap are now well advanced, with a Treaty likely to be ready for signature before the year is out. Officials talks have recently agreed on new working arrangements to minimise problems arising from Indonesian fishing in Australian waters. There is a new mutual commitment to consult and co-operate on plant and animal health and quarantine matters. Following discussions between the Australian Minister for Resources and the Indonesian Minister for Mines and Energy, Indonesia and Australia are to institute high-level consultations on energy matters.

We have a very obvious common interest in developing our bilateral commercial relations. I am pleased that representatives of the business sector from both countries are participating in this seminar because whatever progress we make on the commercial front will, ultimately, depend on the efforts of the private sector. The internal economic reforms which both Governments are currently pursuing provide significant opportunities for increasing two-way trade and investment.

But we should at the same time frankly acknowledge that we do have some way to go before we can say that we have the sort of diversified and integrated commercial relationship that is appropriate for two countries which are close neighbours in this fast growing Asia-Pacific region. The composition of our bilateral trade is heavily oriented towards the unprocessed and semi-processed output of the energy, mining and agriculture industries, and is subject to the dramatic swings of commodity trade. There is a need to broaden the base of our commercial links; to do more in the manufactures and services fields; and to develop markets in areas such as telecommunications, civil engineering, mining equipment and services, and textile fibres.

We have developed over many years very practical links in development co-operation. Australia was influential in the creation of the aid consortium for Indonesia - the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI) - which followed the accession of President Soeharto's "New Order" after 1965. Our role in IGGI is, I believe, valued for the contribution - both qualitative and quantitative - which it makes to Indonesia's economic development. The Australian aid program, with its emphasis on education, agriculture and

public infrastructure programs, is also a useful vehicle for the promotion of distinctive Australian skills and expertise in Indonesia.

We are both active in the councils of multilateral diplomacy where we co-operate on a number of issues, especially on disarmament questions. Both Governments are working closely together to develop support in our region for a comprehensive convention to ban chemical weapons. Indonesia will be participating in a regional seminar on this issue which will be convened in Canberra this August. Indonesia and Australia are also both active members of the Cairns Group of agricultural free traders, and we work closely together, there and elsewhere, in the cause of an open and liberal multilateral trading system.

These elements of common interests, combined with the inescapable logic of geography, and the vital element of political will - which I believe both sides possess - offer, in my view, grounds for optimism about the future of our relations. We cannot guarantee that misunderstandings between our two countries will not occur from time to time. But we can - not least through seminars like this - work to ensure that our two communities are not strangers to each other; and that relations between us continue to expand in a constructive and open spirit to the great benefit of us both.

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