

SEARCH Foundation policy on Timor Leste crisis

1. SEARCH is deeply committed to a genuinely democratic, independent, prosperous and sustainable future for the people of East Timor. Because of this we strongly believe that FRETILIN's popular electoral support means it has a right to expect the program it took to the people to be implemented, and would oppose attempts by other powers, such as United States, Australia and Indonesia, to impose their economic and political interest on the country.
2. Like progressive people everywhere, SEARCH is appalled by what has clearly been the deliberate attempts to foment a political crisis and organised violence, particularly the actions of armed rebel soldiers and police in late May 2006, in order to destabilise and ultimately change the democratically-elected government.
3. We recognise that that this has been confused by opportunistic violent actions by various discontented groups ranging from those who are frustrated by poverty and unemployment to criminal elements and those who have a political agenda.
4. While it is clear which interests – internally and externally – stand to gain from this, it is not clear which have actively planned this violence and destabilisation, and which have simply made the most of the opportunities it presents. SEARCH supports ongoing investigation and exposure of those responsible.
5. However, SEARCH sees no evidence that any of the progressive leadership of the liberation struggle, in particular neither Xanana Gusmao nor Jose Ramos Horta, took any part in planning the destabilisation. We absolutely reject the aberrant claims that have sometimes surfaced to this effect. Equally, we reject any views that the crisis is *simply* a consequence of escalating political mistakes by the leadership of FRETILIN. Ignoring the planned aspects of the crisis and worse, blaming the leadership of Mari Alkatiri, was at best ill-informed, at worst contributed to the destabilisation.
6. SEARCH strongly supports the legitimacy and the overall social and economic record of the FRETILIN government. We believe that one of the greatest tragedies of the crisis is that it will make it far harder to take the final step to establish a democratically elected government through the elections held under the country's first national election law, scheduled for April-May 2007.
7. However, informed political support, as much as effective political action, requires honest and accurate analysis that is able to recognise and acknowledge contradictions and nuances. We do not believe that any real situation is black and white.
8. For that reason we recognise that some decisions of the government and some by other leaders outside the government were ill advised and fuelled, rather than dampened, the divisions and violence being actively promoted by other interests.
9. As Australians, we are also concerned by some of the actions and statements of the Australian government as the crisis unfolded. Through its public statements and actions in the UN Security Council, it actively undermined, rather than supported, the legitimacy of the democratically elected government of East Timor. This follows the unconscionable position taken by the Australian Government during the negotiations over Timor Gap gas and oil resources and the seabed border.

10. The stance taken by the Australian government is not an isolated incident. It reflects a wider policy of intervention in the region which rides rough shod over the legitimacy of many smaller nations, at the same time as increasingly furthering the policy interests of large powers – in particular the US and Indonesia.
11. However, we recognise that international assistance was and is needed to secure the security situation in East Timor, and that Australia's assistance and performance in this role has the support of the government and the FRETILIN leadership within the government.
12. The SEARCH Foundation believes that Australia's policy must be based on the fundamental principle of standing clearly for the right of the East Timorese people to determine their own future, including the right of the democratically elected government to govern. This principle means accepting the right of the East Timorese to make their own policies, decisions and mistakes free from external dictates or destabilisation by anti-democratic internal forces. It also includes their right to make their own economic policy without pressure from the International Monetary Fund or World Bank.
13. East Timor faces grave threats to its future security, prosperity and democracy. These come from a number of directions. The community rifts, fear and gang violence created by those seeking to overturn the government are not yet resolved and will not easily heal. The political opponents of the government have not stopped their destabilisation. And most important, there is real danger that Indonesia's resurgent military will use this opportunity to exact a price for Timor's independence.
14. In the face of this, the greatest unity between all those who led the fight to win independence and who seek the country's future well-being is essential. While all of these leaders have acknowledged the need for such unity, all have contributed to tensions at different times.
15. While a healthy democracy thrives on debate and difference, the future of East Timor is poised too precariously to allow the unity of those who want the best for the country to be fractured at this time in the interests of 'debate' or personal ambition.
16. For that reason SEARCH again encourages all the progressive leadership in East Timor to act in every way to maintain unity at this time and to enable free and democratic elections to be held in April-May 2007, according to the Constitution, to determine the parliament, government and presidency.

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SEARCH Foundation
Level 3, Suite 3B, 110 Kippax St,
SURRY HILLS NSW 2010
Australia
Ph: 02 9211 4164; Fax: 02 9211 1407

ABN 63 050 096 976

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