

The UN's 'neutral' mouthpiece in East Timor

A prominent United Nations functionary in Timor Leste is covertly organising support for Jose Ramos Horta in the run-up to the presidential election.

UNMIT spokesperson Alison Cooper was overheard in a Darwin restaurant encouraging Horta's former media officer Julian Swinstead to return to Dili to "help with Jose's campaign".

Swinstead told his fellow Australian that the pay wasn't good enough to get him back to Dili.

The conversation occurred on Saturday morning 24 March at the Roma Bar in Cavenagh St.

Cooper's indiscretion raises questions about the supposed neutrality of some UNMIT staff in Timor Leste and their relationship to the clique of Australian operatives who have attached themselves to the Horta camp.

Cooper is a former Darwin journalist and Swinstead is a former managing editor of Darwin's Northern Territory News. He was later appointed public relations officer for the Territory's right-wing Country Liberal Party.

Australian Liberal Party president Shane Stone, a confidant of Prime Minister John Howard, recruited Swinstead to the Horta cause.

It was an Australian business associate of Horta's, Wayne Thomas, who asked Stone to find a media officer for Horta. Thomas and Horta jointly own a motor boat now beached in Dili and Thomas owns a tourist resort in Lospalos.

Swinstead's pay packet was the subject of a row last year between Australian Ambassador to Timor Leste and former intelligence officer, Margaret Twomey, and the Dili office of Ausaid, the Australian government's overseas aid arm.

Local Ausaid people were incensed by Twomey's strenuous efforts to have Ausaid foot the bill for Swinstead as part of Australia's 'aid' effort in Timor Leste.

Posted on Timor Online on 31 March 2007 at 23:05

<http://timor-online.blogspot.com/2007/03/mais-do-mesmo-e-imparcialidade-da-un.html#links>

(emphasis added by Timor Online)