

## Letter to The Australian re: Editorial "A dilemma in Dili"

**(The Australian failed to publish the letter)**

Dear Editor

Having spent four of the last eight months working in Timor-Leste, I have been appalled at the consistent lack of balanced reporting of that country by some Australian media.

Standards applied in Australia, such as interviewing more than one side to a dispute, are simply ignored, and journalists and their editors lack even the most basic understanding of the political institutions of the country they claim to speak so authoritatively about.

Your editorial Dilemma in Dili (7.2.07) is an example.

Rather than congratulating deposed Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri for his willingness to subject himself to due legal process, your editorial chose to imply, without a shred of evidence, that the allegations against him still had substance.

This is despite the findings of international and local prosecutors that there was absolutely no evidence to support the allegations put about by army mutineers and opposition parties.

Worse still, your editorial sneered at the man who leads the party which enjoys majority popular support, accused him of imposing a language (Portuguese) on his people which is in fact one of the country's two official languages under the democratically-adopted Constitution, and, worst of all, suggested there was more violence in store as a result of constitutional and legal processes being adhered to and elections being held on time.

The venom you directed at Alkatiri and Fretilin, of course, bears no relation to your paper's previous support of Indonesia's bloody military occupation, and of the Australian government's attempt to rob the newly-independent Timor of its oil revenue - two attempts at domination of their country which Fretilin and Alkatiri played major roles in defeating.

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Copy of the editorial "Dilemma in Dili" from the The Australian is attached for ease of reference.

Source: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/printpage/0,5942,21183256,00.html>

**A dilemma in Dili**

*Mari Alkatiri's return could further destabilise East Timor*

CYNICS who complain that politics consists of little more than two opposing camps verbally sniping at each other should spare a thought for the East Timorese. For this week prosecutors in Dili dropped charges against former East Timorese prime minister Mari Alkatiri, who stood accused not of taking political pot shots at his rivals but rather sending armed hit squads after them. The move leaves the Fretilin leader free to contest April's presidential elections, raising the possibility that East Timor will be left with the notoriously difficult Dr Alkatiri serving as president opposite his rival and successor as prime minister Jose Ramos Horta. Dr Alkatiri, having spent the Indonesian occupation of East Timor exiled in Angola and Mozambique, is also known for insisting on conducting business in Portuguese in a country where most people speak Bahasa Indonesian. Yet although Fretilin has been a destabilising influence, it is also the largest political party in the country and must be included in the democratic process. The last thing East Timor needs is a repeat of the violence sparked by renegade troops last April and May that left 38 dead and forced 150,000 from their homes and which was only put down after the intervention of a multinational force led by Australia.

Just as Australian troops were instrumental in stopping 2006's violence, so too will their presence be necessary to prevent more bloodshed come election time. Australia has about 800 troops on the ground, while UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for a 12-month extension of the UN mission which provides just over 1000 international police and up to 35 military liaison officers to East Timor. These forces will be needed to make sure the elections come off peacefully. Another breakdown in law and order such as was seen last year would deal a serious blow to East Timorese democracy.

While Australian and other foreign troops can help maintain order in the short term, the East Timorese have a lot of work to do if their fledgling democracy is to take wing. Schools have been all but shuttered since last year's violence, damaging the prospects for the next generation of East Timorese. And the economy is a basket case. Most of East Timor's one million people enjoy a per capita income of \$US1 a day. The country has suffered from high youth unemployment virtually since independence and even those few students who manage to go to university overseas return to find that there is nothing for them to do. Whoever finds themselves in power after the next elections will have their work cut out for them.