

Highs and Lows of Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

Dr Helen Hill, Victoria University

Thursday 15 September 2022: 5.30pm for 6pm – 7pm AEST Dyason House, 124 Jolimont Road, East Melbourne

30 August 2022 marks the 22nd anniversary of the UN supervised Popular Consultation or referendum, which led to independence for Timor-Leste. INTERFET, the Australian-led International Force for East Timor contained more than 5,000 Australian soldiers, making it Australia's largest military deployment since the Vietnam War.

Many Australians are rightly proud of their country's contribution to Timor-Leste's independence, which could be seen as a historical corrective to Australia's long-standing support for Indonesia's invasion and forced integration of East Timor in 1975-76.



Yet despite the goodwill INTERFET engendered in Timor-Leste for the Australian people, relations between the two nations rapidly became undermined by contentious negotiations over control of the lucrative oil and gas fields in the Timor Sea. While the 'Maritime Boundary' issue has been solved, it is clear now that bilateral differences of opinion over the processing of the jointly owned resources are by no means a thing of the past.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to see Australia's relations with Timor-Leste purely through the lens of the hydrocarbon resources at the bottom of the sea. AIIA Victoria invites you to join Dr Helen Hill to discuss the many other aspects to the relationship between the two close neighbouring countries, including development assistance, commercial, people-to-people and civil society relations.



Dr Helen Hill first visited Portuguese Timor as a Monash University Masters student in Politics in February 1975. Following the Indonesian invasion, she was part of a group of Australian postgraduate students assisting Jose Ramos Horta establish the office of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste at the UN in New York. Following completion of her thesis on the Nationalist movement in Timor-Leste (later published as *Stirrings of Nationalism in East Timor: FRETILIN 1974-1978*), she was awarded a scholarship at the Australian National University Centre for Continuing Education where she researched *Non-formal Education and Development in Fiji, New Caledonia, and the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*. Helen worked in the Australian aid program, for Members of Parliament and for two years conducted the Diploma Course in Youth and Development for the Commonwealth Youth Program, at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. She has taught at Victoria University in Melbourne for 21 years, introducing a Bachelor's degree in Asia-Pacific Community Development. She led regular study tours to Timor-Leste and was involved in founding the Timor-Leste Studies Association with Michael Leach of Swinburne University. Since retiring from VU in 2012 she has largely lived in Timor-Leste doing short term consultancies for the national university, UNTL, for the Ministry of Education, the Human Capital Development Fund and the UNDP. She is working on a book on Timor-Leste's transition to Independence. Helen Hill was awarded the Medal of the Order of Timor from President Taur Matan Ruak in 2014 for contributions to the country, Timorese and Humanity, and served as Chair of the Australia-East Timor Association from 1999 to 2014.

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