

Recognise Timor

Friends,

It has come to our attention that there is little hope of the nation of Timor-Leste receiving an award in any of the categories of Australian Awards, as they are designed for individuals. We are disappointed that an exception could not be made for the unique contribution which the Timorese people made in World War II as a result of their friendship towards Australian soldiers.

However, we were heartened to learn that consideration is being given to acknowledge the Timorese people and nation in what have been termed "other, more appropriate, forms of recognition". This is indeed good news and we congratulate the Government on taking this matter so seriously. The 24,000 people who have signed the petition we mounted through our ordinary channels agree that the matter is serious.

We are deeply concerned about the welfare of our Timorese neighbours whose current needs have been directly influenced by their historical links with Australia. We make the following important points :

1. OUR RECOGNITION MUST BE WORTHY OF TIMOR-LESTE

Whatever is done to acknowledge the Timorese people's enormous sacrifice in World War II must be **worthy of them** and what they did. At least 40,000 civilians lost their lives because of their support of Australian soldiers. It need not have been that way. The East Timorese could have handed the Australians over to the Japanese, as the West Timorese did within days. As true allies, the East Timorese people suffered grievously during 1942 and for the rest of the War. Any acknowledgement of their role in World War II must be worthy of the facts.

2. OUR RECOGNITION MUST BE WORTHY OF AUSTRALIA

The bond between the Timorese people and the 700 Australian soldiers was deep and lasting. It was not the Timorese who consequently wrote memoirs, appeared on television with their story or lobbied Governments; it was the Australian men who did this because they were so touched by the loyalty and courage they experienced. It was they who repeatedly said that they owed their lives to the Timorese. We cannot behave as though this did not matter. We cannot have it said that Australia honours horses in war, but does not acknowledge the sacrifice of the Timorese people.



We have honoured Animals in War...

3. OUR RECOGNITION MUST BE PRACTICAL

One of the few objections we have had from ordinary people about giving an award to the Timorese people concerned the fear of being satisfied with symbolism. If the Australian Awards system is unsuitable for the recognition of Timor-Leste, perhaps Australia could work towards something of a more practical nature, like education.

Cuba has nearly finished educating 850 Timorese doctors, a truly remarkable feat. Australia has at least as much capacity to do the same, but we have offered very few scholarships in comparison over the last ten years. We could give an entirely unique set of educational opportunities for Timorese people in honour of the huge World War II sacrifice of their forebears.

We believe that whatever response we make must be generous, practical and life-changing.

We await news of the specific ways in which our Government intends to acknowledge the World War II contribution of the Timorese people to Australia.

Thank you for your support

Sister Susan Connelly, Mrs Janet Borg, Mrs Christine Tapsell-Timbs, Mrs Annabelle Rego
Members of the Award for Timor Committee
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