

Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re Inquiry into Human Rights and Good Governance Education in the Asia Pacific Region.**

The Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) endorses the submission of the Australian Council for overseas Aid, of which we are a member, to the above Inquiry.

However, we wish to also provide you with more detail of our work. The entire focus of our operation is human rights and good governance education in the Asia Pacific for the non-government community. We would welcome an opportunity to appear before a public hearing to provide information on our experience and the perspectives we have gained from 13 years of work in this area.

**Introduction to the Diplomacy Training Program.**

We are an NGO established as a company limited by guarantee by Jose Ramos-Horta in 1989, but having an affiliation with the University of NSW through their Law Faculty. The University does not provide any direct funding to our operations. However, we greatly appreciate the 'in kind' assistance of accommodation and administrative support in the form of computers, photocopying, phone, fax and email facilities. As well, a number of academics from the Law Faculty donate their services to the organisation by serving on the Board of the DTP and acting as trainers at programs we conduct.

The content of our teaching program was strongly influenced by Jose Ramos-Horta, and is a reflection of the skills and information he had to acquire by trial and error when he found himself outside East Timor at the time of the Indonesian invasion. At this time, he was tasked with raising the profile of East Timor, going to the UN and ensuring that human rights in East Timor were addressed by the international community. By 1989, when he established the Diplomacy Training Program, Jose saw the need to pass on the skills and knowledge he had acquired to the people of the region, who were struggling with human rights abuses and with trying to establish healthy democracies. Professor Garth Nettheim encouraged him to affiliate with the UNSW through the Law Faculty, believing that Jose's vision of strengthening the rule of law, of democratic processes and of human rights in the region was consistent with the University's responsibilities to the wider community and the region. Jose's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 was an affirmation of Professor Nettheim's support in establishing the affiliation.

**The DTP is not an advocacy organisation, does not promote specific issues or take a stand on specific issues, but rather it provides skills and information to people in the Asia Pacific for them to work within their own countries to promote human rights and good governance.** The Program covers the relevant international human rights law, UN mechanisms and how to access the UN, as well as the skills of strategic advocacy, and using the media and the internet for human rights research and advocacy. Knowledge of the international human rights system is taught as a means to ensure its operation locally in the various countries represented in the trainings.

While having a rigorous intellectual content, the DTP's methodology is not academic, but very practical with frequent use of role plays, discussions, simulations and group work. Participants are middle to upper management from human rights NGOs throughout the Asia Pacific, who are selected on a competitive basis, after strict referee checks to ensure they are from reputable NGOs.

Most programs are conducted in Asia or the Pacific, not at UNSW. Trainers give of their time free of charge. They include a number of UNSW international law academics, key human rights leaders from throughout the region, UN officials and experienced media professionals. As well, out of respect for the considerable regional expertise in the topic, and to ensure that programs are culturally appropriate, local trainers are also recruited in the different cities of Asia and the Pacific where programs are conducted.

**Funding** is obtained from course fees, from international foundations and from donors. Limits to this funding means the organisation has remained small, conducting on average only 2-3 courses of a few weeks duration in any one year. We endorse the ACFOA recommendation that AusAID needs to develop more opportunities for funding this sort of training in the region, as we have found it difficult to meet AusAID guidelines, and so have received only very minimal funding from AusAID. This has mostly been the payment of course fees for participants to our Programs and has amounted to less than \$1,000 a year on average.

**Partners** in the region are important in ensuring the cultural relevance of our work and that it is effective in achieving its aims of empowering people in their home environments. All programs are conducted in conjunction with a local human rights NGO as a partner who assists with the logistics, with the identification of suitable local trainers and with identifying issues that need to be covered. A local university is also usually a co-partner to facilitate contact with suitable trainers and often to provide facilities, such as computer laboratories.

The DTP has endeavoured to keep abreast of best practice both in its content and in its methodology. While the program continues to reflect the vision of its Founder, other topics have been added as a result of changes in the international environment. For example, the Australasian Legal Information Institute, a joint facility of UTS and UNSW, now provides an internet training component to the course, as this has become an important area in recent years.

We also endeavour to optimise our work by recognising that other organisations and networks may be providing similar education. For example, we work closely with the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia) in Bangkok, which has a network of member groups throughout Asia and provides basic training in some of the material we cover. Other networks include the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre and the Pacific Island Association of NGOs, which both have networks of NGOs throughout the Pacific and endeavour to provide training of a limited nature. We endeavour to position our work within the context of other training in order to optimise its effectiveness. Some other key organisations interested in human rights education in the region and with whom we have contact are the Asian Regional Resource Center for Human Rights Education based in the Philippines, Asia-Pacific Human

Rights Information Center (HURIGHTS) based in Japan and LAWASIA based in the Philippines.

Further information about the Diplomacy Training Program can be found on our website at [www.law.unsw.edu.au/centres/dtp](http://www.law.unsw.edu.au/centres/dtp). We enclose a copy of a CD rom that also describes our work.

### **Principles for Effectiveness.**

There are a number of principle that DTP believes are central to our work and which have a wider relevance applicable to anybody concerned with promoting human rights and good governance education in the Asia Pacific.

#### **1. Empower people to act for themselves.**

Australia, and Australian organisations, cannot impose human rights standards or good governance on sovereign countries or on organisations within those countries. Australian involvement therefore must be to empower those within our region seeking to promote these values. There may be important roles for the Australian Government to fill in supporting educational initiatives by governments in the region in relation to human rights. However, non-government organisations in the Asia Pacific are the key to ensuring that these values are both 'owned' and promoted within the region. Asia Pacific human rights NGOs have direct relationships with their governments and their people, and they understand the nuances of local cultural and political environments. DTP believes that respect for this knowledge and respect for people's political integrity allows us to provide skills and information. However, we should not play any part in determining the human rights issues on which NGOs in the region place the most importance and on which they choose to work. Teaching the international human rights legal framework provides the appropriate guidance without dictating issues.

The ACFOA submission to this Inquiry refers to a recent example in PNG last October when some of the female PNG participants after attending a DTP course decided to encourage their organisations to do an alternative country report to CEDAW on how PNG was handling women's issues. DTP played no role in this decision. However, by teaching the possibility of doing alternative reports, we alerted the participants to the mechanism. Examples like this are echoed from every DTP training. Many times we do not find out about them. They represent the empowering of individuals to make their own choices and fully 'own' their actions in supporting human rights and good governance.

Australian initiatives in supporting human rights and good governance education in the region will only be successful if they empower people to act for themselves.

#### **2. Use local knowledge by setting up partnerships.**

DTP uses partnerships with local NGOs and universities to ensure that we maximise local knowledge. Too often outside donors and governments seek to operate within the political context of other countries with only a limited knowledge of the culture and politics of those countries. Setting up and maintaining successful partnerships requires extra work and time, but that effort is essential to optimise local content and political effectiveness.

#### **3. Respect the professional knowledge that already exists in the region.**

There is already significant expertise, experience and knowledge in the human rights and educational communities of the region. This expertise needs to be affirmed and respected

in order to enhance its effectiveness. DTP uses local trainers as much as possible in order to ensure cultural relevance and political effectiveness.

**4. Respect and build on the knowledge and experience that participants bring to any training.**

Effective education requires building on existing knowledge and integrating it within the new teaching. It is also essential that Australia and Australian organisations approach the region with respect for the long cultural and political traditions that exist.

**5. Provide training that compliments existing education.**

There are a number of Asia Pacific organisations already providing human rights education in the region. It is important to respect and reinforce these initiatives. Any new work should be developed in consultation with existing players and to compliment, not compete with existing educational initiatives. DTP endeavours to integrate its work into existing initiatives to ensure that the overall aim of human rights and good governance education is maximised.

**Summary**

The Diplomacy Training Program provides a model that has proved itself sustainable over more than a decade. We believe our experience may be useful in the discussions of the Committee. We would be pleased to provide further evidence to a public hearing or in any other way considered appropriate.

Yours sincerely

**Joan Staples**  
**Executive Director**

**5 December 2002**