

Australia's friendship with Timor-Leste

The friendship relationship reflects and builds on enduring links between the people of Australia and Timor-Leste, including those developed during the Second World War when Australian Special Forces, with the support of many Timorese, resisted Japanese occupation of the then Portuguese colony. After the war, when Indonesia, including West Timor, achieved independence from the Dutch, East Timor remained a Portuguese colony.

Indonesian rule in East Timor commenced with a bloody invasion in 1975, which forced the withdrawal of the Portuguese Administration at the uncertain time of Portugal's transition from dictatorship to democracy. The bonds of friendship with Australia were extended through the work of the solidarity movement and International NGOs during the period of Indonesian military occupation. The occupation was resisted by many Timorese, with others seeking refuge overseas, particularly in Portugal and Australia, and some attempting to co-operate with Indonesian rule.

In August 1999, during Indonesia's own difficult transition from dictatorship to democracy, the people of Timor-Leste overwhelmingly voted against an offer of Special Autonomy status within Indonesia, which was a vote for independence. Because of this, the departing Indonesian military and their militia groups went on rampages killing and injuring thousands, forcibly relocating a large proportion of the population to Indonesian West Timor and destroying most buildings and infrastructure. These events further highlighted the plight of Timor-Leste for many Australians.

The humanitarian crisis led to the deployment of a United Nations' sponsored Australian-led peace keeping intervention to stabilise the situation. An interim period of UN administration followed, during which most of those who had been forcibly relocated returned, and a new constitution was drawn up by an elected Timor-Leste Constituent Assembly.

The involvement of Australian community members and representatives of local governments, particularly from Victoria, as observers for the 1999 independence ballot and the 2000 Constituent Assembly elections led to the friendship relationship between Australian and Timorese communities.

Timor-Leste since independence

In May 2002 Timor-Leste finally became an independent nation recognised by the international community. National elections for the president and parliament were held in 2007, 2012 and 2017.

In October-November 2016 nationwide elections were held for the village community councils in each of the 442 Sucos and 2,336 Aldeias.