

CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

CLRI (NSW)

ABN 52 476 362 010
Member of Catholic Church Religious Group

The Prime Minister, Mr John Howard
Parliament House
Canberra

Thursday 27th May, 2004

Dear Mr Prime Minister,

Re: Honouring achievements in Australia's relationship with East Timor

I write on behalf of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (NSW), a body representing several thousand Catholic Religious men and women across the State.

We acknowledge at this time that the Prime Minister is celebrating thirty years in Parliament serving the Australian people. During your recent anniversary celebrations you acknowledged that one of the achievements of which you were most proud was the decision to send troops to East Timor in September 1999. As someone deeply involved in the reconstruction of East Timor during that period I readily concur with you that the presence of the Australian peacekeepers was an indispensable component of the re-building of East Timor. Indeed, the Government's official recognition of my personal peacebuilding efforts in East Timor during this time attests, I believe, to the commitment that the Australian people have to the long term stability of East Timor.

Given your principled stand on East Timor the CLRI (NSW) is deeply concerned by the recent reports of the Government's approach to the negotiations with the Government of East Timor regarding the oil resources in the Timor Sea.

The gas and oil resources under the sea are subject to internationally agreed laws and customs. Sharing the resources must, in the first instance, be negotiated according to these laws and customs. Sharing of these resources should also conform to the principled stand that the Australian Government took in regard to East Timor in September 1999.

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We believe that Australia can and should be more just, more transparent and more honest in its negotiations with East Timor about the oil in the Timor Sea. We have already alerted our constituents to this unjust situation and will continue to educate them about rights of the Timorese in regard to those resources. We are also alerting them to the reduction in real aid dollars to East Timor in the recent budget. We believe that 'securing, protecting and building' Australia means that the Government should re-assess its position in regard to East Timor because a stronger, more self reliant, more secure East Timor will, in the long run, be in Australia's best interests.

In preparation for the federal election, the CLRI (NSW) will be conducting a comprehensive education campaign that will have a cluster of international issues as a focal point: the denial of human rights to the refugees in Australian on-shore and off-shore detention centres; the slow and steady erosion of Australia's obligations to and compliance of UN Conventions and Protocols; and the unjust way that the new Government of East Timor is being treated in regard to the oil and gas resources in the seas which our neighbouring countries share.

We look forward to hearing from you so that we might communicate the Government's position to the several thousand constituents of the CLRI (NSW).

Yours sincerely,

Julie Morgan
On behalf of the CLRI (NSW) Social Justice Committee