

THE CAMBODIA TRUST AND THE BACKGROUND TO THE EAST TIMOR (TLSPR) INITIATIVE

by

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Despite our country-specific name, the Cambodia Trust has long been committed to extending our work with disabled people to other countries in the Southeast Asian region. In November 1989, when we drew up our original trust deed, we made sure that once our Cambodian programme had been established, we could address the needs of other countries which found themselves in the same situation as late 1980s Cambodia. We thus inserted an additional third clause into the Memorandum and Articles of our deed which read as follows:

‘To bring relief to such other country or countries which may have similar needs to those currently existing in Cambodia and to educate the [UK] public regarding such countries.’

It was not until the new millennium (early 2000) that we were able to begin to make good this third clause. By then the Cambodia Trust was on the way to becoming a truly international charity with major projects starting in Sri Lanka (a new Cambodia Trust-facilitated Sri Lankan School of Prosthetics and Orthotics [SLSPO] funded by our long-term funding partner, the Nippon Foundation, in Colombo) and in East Timor, where a series of discussions and fact-finding missions since February 2000 opened the way for us to establish a major rehabilitation programme for the country’s estimated 12,000 motor disabled (of whom at least a third are in need of prosthetic and orthotic interventions). Already by the late 1990s, international students (Laotians, Sri Lankans, Burmese, Solomon Islanders etc) had begun to enrol in the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO) which the Trust had founded in Phnom Penh in 1994, and they were joined in 2003 by the first East Timorese (there are now two studying at the CSPO with two more to follow in October 2005).

As one of the original co-founders of the Cambodia Trust in 1989, I have long had a special interest in East Timor stemming from my work as an historian of Indonesia and my publications on the East Timor issue, notably my *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation* (London: Cassell, 1995). Since November 1983, when I was first asked to write a review in *The Times Literary Supplement* of a major work on East Timor (former Australian consul in East Timor, James Dunn’s, *East Timor: A People Betrayed* [Milton, Qld: Jacaranda Press, 1983]), I have done what I could to support East Timor’s just struggle for independence through my historical writings and academic connections based on my position as a Fellow and Tutor in Modern History (and Vice-President, 1998-99) of Trinity College, Oxford, and my role as Executive Director of the Asian Studies Centre (1985-88) of St. Antony’s College. These

enabled me to help facilitate the visit of Dr José Ramos-Horta, now Foreign Minister of East Timor, as Senior Associate Member (SAM) of St. Antony's in 1988, and to gather the signatures for and see into print the 27 January 1997 publication of an open letter in *The Independent* signed by over 40 College principals and senior Oxford academics calling for an end to the Indonesian occupation and a referendum on East Timor's future. We were one of the first major universities in the world to publish such a letter.

In late 1999, following the UN-supervised vote on 30 August 1999, when 78.5 percent of Timor's population chose independence, I proposed to our Cambodia Trust board that we should investigate the possibility of setting up a specific country programme in East Timor. This was pressing given the extensive needs in the territory following the destruction wrought by the departing Indonesian military when 75 percent of the country's housing stock and infrastructure were destroyed and two-thirds of the population displaced. This was accepted by the board, and two fact-finding surveys (February and June 2000) were undertaken by myself with the present Cambodia Trust Executive Director, Carson Harte, then based in Singapore, and an East Timor expert from Lisbon, Mr Carlos Guerreiro, who is fluent in Tetum the lingua franca of East Timor and many of the territory's other languages. These fact-finding missions were followed by a separate mission by the Executive Director in October 2000 which sought to identify possible donors. These fact-finding missions established a level of need in the wider Timorese population for prosthetic and orthotic care at a level of 1.5% of the then population of just on 700,000 (Timor's population is now 924,000, most having returned from forced displacement in Indonesian West Timor and elsewhere).

Because of financial difficulties experienced by the Cambodia Trust following 9-11 (Al-Qaeda attacks on US), the implementation of the East Timor project was delayed by a year, but in September 2002, I traveled to East Timor again to meet with the Minister of Health in the newly-independent East Timorese Government, Dr Rúi Maria de Araújo, and put four possibilities with regard to the needs of the disabled in East Timor: (1) to ignore the problem until the other more pressing health needs (e.g. dengue, malaria, TB etc) had been met (I suggested this was *morally* unacceptable); (2) send all prosthetic and orthotic patients to rehabilitation centres in Indonesia (e.g. Manggarai [Flores], and Yogya and Solo in Java) as had happened in the Indonesian occupation period (1975-99) (I suggested with this was both *politically* and *practically* unacceptable because of the expense of transport, the difficulty of obtaining visas and the necessity for prosthetic and orthotic patients to have constant access to Indonesian prosthetic and orthotic facilities); (3) concentrate care of all beneficiaries at Mary Knoll-run clinic in Aileu where Sr Susan Gubbins established a small orthotic facility in the late 1990s, a facility which is now run by former Cambodia Trust director Bill Velicky (I suggested this was *geographically* unacceptable given the location, lack of dormitory facilities for out-of-town patients, and the inaccessibility of Aileu as a national prosthetic and orthotic centre for whole of East Timor); or (4) open a new national centre in Dili run by the Cambodia Trust and the resources of the Cambodian School of Prosthetics & Orthotics (CSPO) and the Cambodia Trust rehabilitation centre in Phnom Penh. After lengthy discussions, which also involved the RDTL (Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste) cabinet, the fourth option was chosen. The same cabinet meeting also decided that the care of the disabled (and the Cambodia Trust project) would be placed under the aegis of the Secretariat of State for Labor and Solidarity, whose head, HE Mr Arsenio Bano, is an old friend from the Timor solidarity movement days in London in the mid to late 1990s.

Extensive consultations then took place with existing Timorese and international NGOs (Katilosa, Ahisaun, Mary Knoll Missioners [Aíleu], PRADET, Klibur Domin Ryder-Cheshire, The Leprosy Mission [TLM], CARE, UNICEF, WHO) working in the disability field and with the East Timorese Government (Ministries of Health and Secretary of State for Labor & Solidarity) in order to identify key priorities for the new Cambodia Trust-sponsored programme. Finally, just over a year later, in November 2003, the Christian Blind Mission (CBM) of Germany decided – through its Australian branch (CBM International) – to part fund the Cambodia Trust's East Timor programme for the first five years to the tune of US\$600,000 on condition that the Trust was registered and operated in East Timor as a local NGO. This led in December 2003, to the establishment of a new local NGO, ASSERT (Associação Hi't Ema Ra'es Timor/Association for the Raising up and Equalisation of the Disabled of Timor), which has an all-East Timorese board and patrons. By then the first East Timorese (Nelson da Silva) had been selected for training at the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO) in Phnom Penh, his three-year diploma course being paid for by USAID (Leahy War Victims Fund) through the International Society for Prosthetics & Orthotics (ISPO).

Following the formal allocation of a government site at Becora (Dili) on 26 January 2004, ASSERT began actively seeking financial support in East Timor itself through Embassy small grants projects for the renovation of an existing derelict building (the ex-mess hall and dormitory of the former Indonesian Departmen Tenaga Kerja [Depnaker/Department of Manpower] complex in Becora) to turn it into a permanent, locally-run national rehabilitation centre – to be known as the Timor Loro Sae Centre for Physical Rehabilitation (TLSPR) - offering essential, high-quality, appropriate and affordable rehabilitation services for the estimated 6,000 Timorese currently registered with the Ministry of Labor and Solidarity as motor disabled (*cacad tubuh*). It is envisaged that key activities will involve providing prosthetic and orthotic services (the prescription and fitting of artificial limbs and orthopaedic braces), physiotherapy, wheelchairs and other mobility aids. Meanwhile, The Leprosy Mission International [TLMI], which is in the process of setting up its own leprosy eradication programme in East Timor – Timor having one of the highest rates of leprosy infection in the world (80 in every thousand in some communities in the East Timorese enclave of Oecussi in West Timor – compared to an international average of 1.5 per thousand)*, decided to become smaller co-funders with CBMI of the ASSERT rehab programme provided that we include the country's large leper population amongst our beneficiaries.

On the funding front, the Cambodia Trust/ASSERT received positive responses from many local donors in East Timor, including the Canada Fund (US\$32,000 for the conference room/library and back verandah wing of the rehabilitation centre), NZAID (US\$15,000 for the borehole and water supply for the rehabilitation centre site [TLSPR]; US\$30,000 from the UK/DFID [Department For International Development] for the reception, casting room, offices and patient dormitories, US\$12,000 from Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI) via the Irish Embassy on Dili for our renovated 65kva generator, and most generous of all US\$54,000 from the Japanese Grassroots Fund for the main workshop and machine room. The addition of other generous grants from CBMI (US\$33,000), the Clothworkers' Foundation (a City of London liveried company) (US\$36,000) and the Isle of Man Overseas Aid Committee (US\$17,000) enabled us to complete the building, the renovation being undertaken by Carya Timor Leste, an Indonesian

firm with long experience of working in East Timor. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) through its Special Disability Fund has also provided much of the necessary equipment and orthopaedic stock for the rehabilitation centre.

We have also been fortunate in attracting high quality expatriate staff to work in the rehabilitation centre. These include Louise Maher, a volunteer physiotherapist from Sydney funded by the PALMS Catholic relief agency, Tanya Wells-Brown, a British physiotherapist previously employed at the Royal Perth Hospital who raised all her own funds to volunteer to work for an initial four months in Timor, September-December 2004 and who will return for another four months as a USAID-funded volunteer this year, Cornelis Visser, a Dutch Category 1 Prosthetist-Orthotist, who has had extensive experience in Nepal, particularly working with leprosy patients, who will be taking over as Director of the programme in March 2005, and two Category 2 Prosthetist-Orthotists from the Pakistan Institute of Prosthetic & Orthotic Sciences (PIPOS) in Peshawar. All these highly experienced health professionals will be vital to the building of our ASSERT programme in Timor during the coming years. Meanwhile, the official opening of the TLSPR rehabilitation centre will take place on 14 April next. Photographs of that special day will be posted on our website.

Peter Carey
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* The reasons for this very high incidence of leprosy in Oecussi and other areas of East and Indonesian West Timor is unclear but as an historian, I might speculate that the Portuguese might have used Oecussi as a leper colony in the 16-mid-19th century period when their colonial territories stretched over much of what is now the Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT).