

8.2 THE MONASH FRIENDS OF VEMASSE – TIMOR-LESTE

Submitting Councillor: Joy Banerji

NOTICE OF MOTION

That Council:

- 1. Explores the development of a formal Friendship Relationship with the Sub-District of Vemasse, in Timor-Leste, in consultation with the Monash Friends of Vemasse.*
- 2. Explores the feasibility and cost of providing administrative support to the Monash Friends of Vemasse.*
- 3. Considers nominating a Councillor/s and Council Officer to the Committee of the Monash Friends of Vemasse.*
- 4. Receives a progress report by February 2009 on the outcomes of parts 1 and 2 of this Motion and considers the nomination of a Councillor/s and Council officer to the Committee following the receipt of the progress report.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Motion is to seek Council's support of the Monash Friends of Vemasse and propose the development of a Friendship Relationship with the Sub-District of Vemasse in Timor-Leste.

BACKGROUND

Since the independence referendum in East Timor in 1999 a number of local governments have begun to establish formal friendships with communities in East Timor (Timor-Leste). Currently there are nearly sixty local governments that have established Friendship Relationships with respective Districts in Timor-Leste.

The Monash Friends of Vemasse has requested Council's participation in its activities and formal participation in the Friendship Relationship Program with Vemasse.

DISCUSSION

The Monash Friends of Vemasse was established in 2005 following a public meeting that involved local churches, schools, service clubs and other groups located in the City of Monash.

Since its inception the Monash Friends of Vemasse has been involved in the School's Scholarship Program, which supports primary and secondary school students' needs in Timor-Leste. The Friends group holds fundraising activities

and meets with local schools in the City of Monash to introduce the School's Friendship Program and encourage local schools to participate in the program.

Nearly 100 schools in Australia are involved in this program.

In June 2008 members of the Monash Friends of Vemasse visited Vemasse and delivered \$1,250 USD, raised through fund raising activities to support twenty-four unpaid teachers at two newly established secondary schools in Vemasse. The members of the Friends group also delivered educational equipment including books. The trip was self-funded.

The Monash Friends of Vemasse relies on support from its members and the local community and all members volunteer their time, expertise, knowledge and resources in promoting and creating awareness of the Friendship Relationship program. Unlike other Friendship Groups across local government the Monash group receives no support, in kind or monetary, from the City of Monash or from any other entity and relies solely on the contributions made by those who attend fundraising activities organised by the group.

The Monash Friends of Vemasse relies on the generosity of their members who offer their homes to host meetings and other activities. In addition, members of the Committee of the Monash Friends of Vemasse manage all administrative work themselves including planning and implementation of events and other initiatives and in the majority of cases cover costs associated with these activities.

FRIENDSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

Although each Friendship Relationship is autonomous, the principles in the original 'Statement of Principles' apply to all the Friendship Relationships.

These are -

- Respect and support for Timorese led decision-making
- Assistance provided is sustainable
- It is a long-term (10-year minimum) commitment
- The relationship is based on mutual respect and collaboration

A copy of the Statement of Principles appears in Attachment 1.

In many cases, the Friendship Relationships are formalised by a written Friendship Agreement, based on the 'Statement of Principles'. This agreement is signed by representatives of the Australian local government and/or community group and the Timor-Leste District or sub-District involved and governs the operation of the relationship.

The range of activities and projects in Timor-Leste supported by Australian Friendship groups varies from District to District and includes:

- scholarships for secondary and tertiary students
- training of teachers and other professionals
- assistance with agricultural and other projects

- support for the development of vocational training, construction and refurbishment of buildings, and
- provision of internet access, as well as direct material aid, such as office equipment.

The Relationship usually involves visits to Timor-Leste and Australia by representatives of the partners and support for projects and activities in Timor-Leste. The visits to Australia are generally funded by the Australian partner. Any trips to Timor-Leste would be self-funded by participants.

Australian Friendship groups are encouraged to understand the objectives of the Timor-Leste Government's National Development Plan and the District Development Plans, and to plan projects in close coordination with the District Administration, taking account of the activities of other NGO's, in the District.

In providing assistance, Friendship groups try to respond to the needs and priorities of the local Timor-Leste community. In several Districts, Commissions have been established to manage the Friendship Relationship and establish priorities for assistance. Over time, the emphasis of the assistance has changed from emergency relief and material aid in the early years after 1999, to a greater emphasis on training and capacity building of individuals and organisations.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This proposal is consistent with Council's Multicultural Framework and Action Plan 2006-2008 and the Monash Council Plan 2006-2010.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

As the recommendation explores the feasibility and cost of providing administrative support it is proposed that in-kind support for printing, meeting rooms etc be provided in the short term with a longer term commitment to be resolved at a future date subject to the outcome of the feasibility study. A potential funding source could include making an application through the Community Grants process.

CONCLUSION

The provision of support to the Monash Friends of Vemasse and the consideration of the development of a formal Friendship Agreement with the District of Vemasse would recognise the invaluable work undertaken, in a voluntary capacity, by citizens of Monash to benefit members of the community in Vemasse. In addition Council will be joining some sixty other Councils that have already formed Friendship Relationships and have contributed and continue to do so in the re-building and development of local communities in Timor-Leste.

ATTACHMENT 1**Statement of Principles for Victorian Local Governments working in East Timor**

In recognition of East Timor as an independent nation and in acknowledgment of the struggles of the heroic people of East Timor, the people of Victoria through their representatives in local government and the people of East Timor through their representatives in the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) hereby agree that:

- ◆ A lasting friendship shall be built on a partnership of mutual respect; this friendship shall at all times respect and value local as well as national cultures and decision-making processes;
- ◆ Local governments and organisations at a community level have expertise and experience in caring for and developing local communities;
- ◆ The knowledge and expertise of local governments in Victoria shall be shared through partnerships with the people of East Timor;
- ◆ This agreement welcomes East Timor as a close neighbour of Australia at all levels of democratic government.
- ◆ Material contributions by local governments in Victoria to the re-building of the nation of East Timor shall most effectively be provided in consultation and co-operation with the local as well as national representatives of the people of East Timor;
- ◆ Recognising the need to supplement the contribution of the United Nations, other international agencies and non-government organisations the parties now wish to implement community to community partnerships; and
- ◆ We shall respect and honour the efforts of all those Victorians and East Timorese who in a spirit of democratic endeavour work to improve the quality of life of their communities.