



Carmelite Friars of Australia and Timor-Leste

MISSION COORDINATOR UPDATE 08.09.09

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Celebrations have only just taken place to remember ten years after East Timor's independence vote. Our thoughts and prayers are therefore with all Timorese people at this landmark time in their history.

My last visit to East Timor was in May. I experienced life as the best that it has been for a long time. Overall security was very good and everyday life appeared very peaceful. Most of the IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps in Dili had closed. This is a great achievement by the Timorese Government who have given cash payments to families to return home.

There were also many new buildings going up both in Dili and around the country. It was wonderful to see in Dili new footpaths being built, trees being planted in these footpaths and rubbish cleared.

The rift between the army and the police appeared to be largely repaired. I was also very happy to hear that the Government has announced that roads and water will be national priorities in 2010.

East Timor still faces huge challenges. It is still the poorest country in Asia. Forty percent of Timorese live below the poverty line. Seventy percent of the people live in rural areas, surviving on subsistence farming and food bartering. Zumalai sub-district, in which the Carmelite parish is situated is a very remote, rural and mountainous area of Covalima district.

One of the biggest challenges for East Timor is to tackle the lack of skills in the country. The Timorese have learnt many skills of survival and resistance but now need educational skills at all levels.

The Carmelites have put a strong focus on education in the Zumalai sub-district. Two primary schools have been completely renovated and three new classrooms will soon be completed at one of these schools. A large number of scholarships have been set up for senior high school students to enable them to do agricultural, technical and other studies at some of the better boarding schools in the country. There are four students training at the Baucau Teachers College to become primary teachers. There were six Timorese receiving financial support to teach in two primary schools in the Zumalai sub-district who have now received government contracts.

Time Change for Timorese Academic Year

The Carmelite scholarship programme will be on hold for a few months this year as the East Timorese Government has changed the school academic year to commence in January 2010 instead of the end of September as has been the case in previous years.



Dili in 1999



Dili in 2009

Schools will finish at the end of September and then teachers will attend intensive Portuguese language training.

NEW ZUMALAI YOUTH PROJECT

Building extensions that have taken place on the Zumalai Compound are enabling a new youth centre project to begin to take shape. It will be a computer training centre for the youth of Zumalai sub-district.

The building for the youth centre (see photo directly below) is sturdy and made from cement. It houses one of the solar energy plant systems on the compound. The inside of this building has been multi-functional. It has been home to a sewing group, parish offices and accommodation, but all of these activities are being relocated with other renovations now being completed.



Building to be converted to a Youth Centre



Inside the Youth Centre Building at Present

The office workers above, who are inside the new youth centre building, have now moved to a new reception centre on the compound.

I believe that this Youth Project is an excellent idea especially as it is the Timorese themselves who have submitted the project. Fifty-four percent of the population in Timor-Leste are under eighteen years of age and it is the youth who are the future of the country. Another statistic that supports this project is that the population of East Timor will double within ten years.

Because of this statistic and especially because the Zumalai youth have nothing to do when they finish school, one of the young people who works on the Carmelite compound and the parish priest gave me a submission for the Computer Training programme last November. During my visit to East Timor in May of this year a very positive discussion took place about the process, development and implementation of the Youth Project.

It was decided that the proposal would have three components:

Training – The Timorese who will lead the programme will need to have professional training to learn, use and maintain computers. This component would be put into operation as soon as possible. The Timorese showed how much they wanted this project to be implemented by naming two places in East Timor where training could take place.

Buying of Computers and Furniture - Discussion took place about beginning the purchase of computers and furniture in a small way and networking with other groups in East Timor who are already doing computer training.

Building Renovations It was seen that most of the inside renovations of the Youth Centre could easily take place because of their temporary nature.

CARMELITE CHARITY BALL AND AUCTION

The Carmelite Development Office is organizing this amazing function. All the information is on the attachment with this "Update".

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