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FMSI

Per il Bene dei Bambini

Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale ONLUS

**United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review
26th Session (Oct 31th – Nov 11th 2016)
UPR of Timor Leste**

Preamble:

1. This joint submission of Edmund Rice International and Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale ONLUS (NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC) is made on behalf of Comunidade Edmund Rice (CER), the banner under which the Christian Brothers Oceania Province (CBOP) operates in Timor Leste.

2. CER basically works in the District of Ermera – specifically in the sub-District of Railaco, in five (5) villages – Taraco, Deleso, Samelete, Railaco Leten & Railaco Kriac. Total population of 5,000 people. One person teaches English in Dili.

3. The following observations are made in the light of the work of CER in these small villages. CER cooperates with various Government Departments particularly in the areas of Education & Health in dealing with families & children.

4. Primary Education: CER acts in a support role of three (3) government schools in remote villages. This is done by paying seven staff (7), conducting training for teachers & purchasing & supplying education materials. Student population: 500.

5. Pre-school: CER built, runs & operates ten (10) preschools. This is done by employing teachers (26), conducting training for teachers, managing a food program & nurturing 247 children between the ages of 3 and 5 years.

6. Health: In conjunction with the Government Health Department the CER staff of three (3) work with the staff of the Health Clinic in Railaco Leten & conduct an ambulance service in support of the Health team.

7. This submission particularly addresses two recommendations made at the first UPR review of Timor Leste, both of which enjoyed the support of Timor Leste.

Nutrition in Schools

78.30 Continue efforts to develop policies and programmes to reduce malnutrition throughout the country, in particular by improving school meal programmes

8. The instance of malnutrition in the area in which CER operates has been much reduced. While the issue of malnutrition is seen as the responsibility of the Health Department, it is implemented by the Education Department. There are apparent loopholes here. While at the policy level the program can receive a tick – at the practical level there are problems.

9 The money to purchase food supplies for primary schools is in the hands of local people. Low paid cooks are in place. Plates & spoons are provided. The delivery of the main ingredient – rice, is in the control of the local department. The program is never set to start at the commencement of the school year – a delay of at least a month occurs at times. When the money/food runs out – that's it. No more food program.

10. As yet the policy does not cater for the preschool children. CER currently operates the food program throughout the time of schooling. CER provides rice, vegetables & a nutritious supplement called Goodi Goodi Gisi (GGG). In 2016 it is hoped to introduce eggs into the diet.

11. A visitor to the area from Australia in 2002 was appalled by the number of malnourished children in the villages. In a subsequent visit in 2012 she happily observed that she could not find one needy child in the area. So it can be said that across the board children's health has improved.

12. Effective implementation of policy & practice is also evidenced by an immunisation program for babies, treatment for Rubella & Measles and the distribution of corn powder to families for young children. These are positive signs and are welcomed by young mothers.

13. From colonial times there has been only one clinic available for the people across the five (5) villages. Some fifteen (15) years ago, CER became involved with the provision of a mobile clinic visiting the villages. In recent years the government announced an ambitious policy – the provision of a clinic, doctor & nurse for all villages across the country. While it is taking time and medications are in short supply, a second staffed clinic has opened in Taraco and plans are in hand to commence the building a third clinic – this time in Railaco Kriac.

14. Unfortunately there seems to be a lack of synergy between the two departments (Health and Education) responsible for children regarding access to health care services. Health Department personnel are not invited into the schools to assist with health education. The major issues of respiratory problems, diarrhoea in babies, precautions against TB, dangers of betel nut chewing & smoking habits appear not to be addressed by either department in a systematic way through the provision of education & prevention programs.

15. A strong barrier to modern health assistance for patients is the matter of traditional medicine. Understandably families resort to traditional remedies before seeking the services of a doctor or a hospital. CER is aware of at least two

cases of loss of life in recent years through delays in referring ill children to hospital after the traditional medicine treatment had proved ineffective.

Recommendations:

- a. That the Government of Timor Leste ensure already existing Education officers visit schools in their assigned area to monitor & verify that the vital food programs for Primary Schools are running for the full school year.
- b. That the Government of Timor Leste immediately fund & implement a full food program for preschools.
- c. That the Government of Timor Leste set in train a policy to have the Ministries of Education & Health develop strategies to ensure the direct intervention of health professionals, into the school program working with classroom teachers in the best interest of children.

Education

78.37 Further implement the National Education Strategic Plan 2011-2013

16. Assurances have been provided by the Central Office of Basic Education in Dili that the Government is working towards the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The Department is reviewing the curriculum, conducts regular training for teachers, keeps detailed records of attendance & occasionally provides materials for teachers & students. While these basic features of a well-organised department are in place, the appalling level of staff & children absence from school is not being addressed.

17. In the area where CER operates:

- a) some teachers go to market and run a stall or run a small business from home during school time
- b) some teachers do not come to school on occasions because the Government will not supply funds for transport.
- c) teachers often come late for class with the consequence that children follow this example.
- d) schools are sometimes shut down for a week if a special civic or religious event is to happen.
- e) children are often absent from school due to family commitments – going to market, working in the garden, caring for younger siblings.

18. A major obstacle to the advancement of education in Timor Leste is the constitutional imperative that Portuguese & Tetun are the official languages. An apparent anomaly is that English is not to be taught at the primary level yet English grammar is taught at the secondary level. This confusion in the teaching of language leads to poor teaching & lack of interest by children.

19. The nepotism that is ingrained in the system is being addressed, but only very slowly. Family members are appointed to teaching positions ahead of the qualified teachers emerging from the National & Baucau Teachers Colleges. As an example, in one of the primary schools supported by CER, a government

classroom teacher left abruptly. He was given a job immediately in another village primary school within the same jurisdiction. CER were approached in the crisis to replace the teacher. An offer from CER to recruit a new graduate from the teachers college was not accepted. The coordinator of the school preferred to appoint a local person who had never taught before, while still asking CER to fund the position. In the circumstances, this arrangement was reluctantly agreed to, but only for the current year.

20. The system is very hierarchical. Teachers see themselves as more important than the children. They come late to class, spend inordinate time in the staffroom and do very little preparation & correction of work.

21. As an example: A new set of three classrooms was built by the Education Department at one of the schools supported by CER. As soon as the rooms were ready, the staff moved from their adequate quarters into one of the new classrooms. CER found funding to refurbish another classroom beyond the standard of the room occupied by the staff. Immediately the staff requested to move to this better room despite it being funded for the use of the children!

22. Despite these problems, those children who come to school regularly are happy, and content to learn in the restricted way presented to them. Based on experience from our limited geographical area there seems to be no inordinate punishment of children.

23. Education in Timor Leste is provided by the Government, by Religious Congregations & by profit making Private Operators. Private Universities have opened regional learning centres to enable better access for students.

24. Early education in Timor Leste is free. In more recent times families have been directed to purchase uniforms for their primary children. Costs rise the further that children progress in their education. Private Universities charge high fees for Timorese families. NGO's and Religious Congregations provide scholarships to enable students to attend tertiary studies at Universities, Business Colleges & Trade Training Centres. At present CER provides 20 scholarships for students annually.

25. SEPFOPPE – the arm of Government which implements Vocational Training for young disadvantaged adults (STV), appears reluctant to fund programs. Irregular funding for programs make it very difficult for CER to work in partnership with SEPFOPPE.

Recommendations:

- a) That the Timor Leste Government ask the Minister of Education to appoint and train inspectors of schools to track the attendance rates of teachers & students across the country.
- b) That the Timor Leste Government amend the constitution to ensure the study of languages is broadened, less prescriptive, and inclusive of English as an alternative.

- c) That the Timor Leste Government continue to address the issue of nepotism in employment, especially in education, so as to create equal opportunity for all citizens.
- d) That the Timor Leste Government address the issue of accessibility to tertiary education.