



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

East Timor

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.51 a.m.), by leave: Last month I lead a Queensland delegation to East Timor that included my parliamentary colleague the member for Stafford, Terry Sullivan, and representatives from the Queensland University of Technology and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. The purpose of the trip was to provide delegates with an insight into the nature, scale and complexity of the reconstruction required for education and training in East Timor and to demonstrate Queensland's support and solidarity with the people of East Timor.

On arriving in Dili, it is impossible not to be struck by the devastation and upheaval that that city has recently witnessed. This stands in stark contrast to the natural beauty of the country and the warmth of the East Timorese people. Officials were positive about the Queensland delegation's visit and were prepared to discuss the opportunities and impediments to interacting with the various agencies in East Timor. Many officials commented on their appreciation of the Premier's earlier visit, which they regarded as a genuine effort to establish long-term relationships. The Queensland delegation met with Father Filomeno Jacob, the most recent cabinet member for Social Services, and senior officers of his department. This meeting provided a real insight into issues confronting East Timor in seeking to re-establish an education system. The militia had destroyed almost all of the school facilities in this country. While the United Nations has made the rebuilding of these facilities its top priority, many East Timorese children continue to go without basic equipment such as chairs and desks. Much of the discussion focused on the work that lay ahead for this country in rebuilding its education system.

The East Timorese people, like many others, place a very high value on education, and Queensland is well placed to assist the new government to provide education services. Our delegation visited the site where two Education Queensland sponsored teachers, Vivien Bampton and Kathy Symmons, are providing in-service training to East Timorese high school English teachers and education division staff. The two Queensland teachers were obviously enjoying the experience of being part of the rebuilding of East Timor. There was a warm connection between the teachers and their students.

The delegation attended a range of meetings with officials from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Australian Mission. These meetings proved to be invaluable in establishing links and gaining an understanding of current and future business opportunities. The delegation also made a tour of a range of Dili educational institutions, including both public and private schools and universities. While the schools were very basic, the enthusiasm of the children and staff for learning was inspiring. One of the highlights of the trip was meeting with Queensland volunteers and workers who had made great personal sacrifice to take on the job of helping to rebuild East Timor. It was obvious that the Australian volunteers and workers were very well regarded by local people. I was impressed by the passion and commitment displayed by these volunteers and workers for the job ahead of them.

The delegation also met with Mr Jose Teixeira, director of the East Timor Division of Trade and Investment and a former constituent of the member for Yeerongpilly. He will be well known to many members of the parliament as a former litigation solicitor with Deacon Milani in Brisbane before his return to East Timor. As a former resident of Queensland, Jose provides a valuable link between the

emerging East Timorese government and the Queensland government. He spoke of his return to his homeland and his eagerness to rebuild East Timor. He says that he now understands the need for the rebuilding of his country to take sufficient time to ensure the will of the people is listened too and that the job is done properly.

The delegation also visited the Xanana Gusmao Reading Room which was established in 2000 with book stocks received from the Mareeba and Smithfield libraries, as well as books from Byblos. I acknowledge here the work of the Avid Reader Bookshop in my own electorate and the American Bookstore for their fundraising efforts for the reading room, which is helping young university students immensely.

By the time this House meets again, East Timor will have its first government democratically elected by the East Timorese people. This election, to be held on 30 August, has been a long time coming for the people of East Timor, many of whom fought and died for this basic right. The whole world will be watching the election. We look forward to working with the new government of East Timor. I am sure that all honourable members join me in offering our best wishes to the East Timorese for a peaceful process in rebuilding their new and, most importantly, independent nation. I table the report of the delegation for the information of the House.
