

OPEN DOOR NEEDED

THERE is no doubt that Indonesia now has a story to tell. It would be a dreadful, counter-productive waste of all its efforts and those of others, if it does not begin to allow more foreign journalists and observers in to see for themselves," wrote Mr Peter Hastings, foreign editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, who has just visited East Timor. An open-door policy by the Indonesian Government is the only right policy. It is also the only policy which can heal the hurt relations between Australia and Indonesia and also enhance the standing throughout the world of President Suharto's Government. Special invitations from Jakarta to selected foreign journalists and others are not good enough. Inevitably, despite the integrity of those selected, their conclusions and their evidence cannot be accepted with total confidence if they are untested by the findings of foreign observers whom the Indonesian Government has *not* selected.

Mr Hastings is a professional journalist, who values his reputation. So, as expected of an experienced journalist in a difficult situation, he began by explaining the circumstances of the invitation he received: "The Indonesian Embassy contacted me in Sydney and asked me whether I could visit East Timor as part of a proposed pre-election visit to Indonesia." It was a particular Indonesian Government initiative, although Jakarta must have known that *any* Australian journalist would want to go. Others are also well qualified, including Mr Rodgers, who was told to leave Jakarta in February last year, when he was resident correspondent there for *The Sydney Morning Herald*. He had also been to East Timor, as Mr Hastings recalled. It is more than a year since any Australian journalist has been allowed to reside in Indonesia, let alone visit East Timor. The ABC has been without a resident correspondent since Mr Beutler was not allowed to return in June, 1980.

Inevitably, this policy of exclusion raises doubts in Australia about the situation in Indonesia and, particularly, in East Timor. And Australian journalists are certainly not the only foreign journalists being excluded, even for visits. As *The Times*, London, wrote in an editorial on February 24, "Indonesia has obviously not won over the hearts and minds of the East Timorese, and her very unwillingness to allow independent observers access to the territory corroborates that". If *The Times* is mistaken and the East Timorese have been won over, then why has its correspondent in Singapore, Mr Watts, been refused permission to go there?

Envoy's visit

Mr Hastings would have welcomed, of course, a general invitation to foreign media to send to East Timor correspondents selected by themselves. Then his own position would not have been so lonely and exposed. Journalists believe in competition for the truth and they believe that their own reports should be tested by the reports of their competitors, if the people they serve are to be well informed and also convinced.

Also, Mr Hastings was not served well by the Indonesian Government in being closely associated during his visit with Mr Whitlam, another man of integrity but also the Prime Minister responsible for Australia's controversial foreign policy during the planning period for Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in December, 1975. Again, the purpose of the Indonesian Government's special invitation to Mr Hastings and Mr Whitlam becomes apparent when it is realised that the Minister for Information, General Ali Murtopo, is the man who planned the political preliminaries to the invasion and that the head of BAKIN (the Indonesian security intelligence body), General Murdhani, was the commander of the invasion forces. It has to be asked why such men would want Mr Hastings and Mr Whitlam to visit East Timor and not, apparently, other foreign observers? The question is unfair to both Mr Hastings and Mr Whitlam, but it is one to which Indonesian policy has now subjected them.

It is true that the Australian Ambassador in Jakarta, Mr Dalrymple, has been in East Timor recently and has spoken about it. But diplomats are not, for good professional reasons, reliable public reporters. However, journalists are not the only people who should be allowed into East Timor. In January Mr Alston, chairman of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, suggested that an ACFOA delegation would like to go. Earlier, he had welcomed the appointment of a Senate committee of inquiry into East Timor. If the Indonesian Government wants Australian popular understanding of its work today in East Timor, why does it not invite Australian MPs to go there? Some have asked to go. After all, rightly or wrongly, Australia has recognised the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia *de facto* and, by implication, *de jure*. Now, may we not satisfy ourselves with confidence about the results of that incorporation?