

# BACKING FOR TIMOR PLEA

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**An urgent plea for massive financial aid for Timorese people facing starvation this year is likely to receive strong support in Australia.**

In a letter to the Australian Catholic Relief Committee this week, the Apostolic Administrator of Dili in East Timor, Monsignor Da Costa Lopes, has warned of the impending famine and called for financial aid of up to \$250 000.

**Monsignor Lopes warned that food shortages on Timor already were serious and the 500 000 people there faced famine this year unless substantial outside help was received.**

He has blamed the continuing presence of Indonesian troops on the island for disruption to the Timorese people's subsistence economy and a shortfall in food production.

Darwin East Timor activist, Mr Robert Wesley-Smith, today said he was shocked, but not surprised, by news of an impending famine.

"They predicted it months ago," he said.

He called for strong financial support for the Timorese people and urged people to send donations to the Australian Catholic Relief Committee through the local Catholic church.

"It's about time the people of Darwin did something for their nearest neighbors... it will be the first thing they have done," he said.

He called on the Federal Government to support any relief action in East Timor and ensure access for aid organisations.

## 500 000 could face starvation

The Catholic Bishop of Darwin, the Reverend John O'Loughlin also strongly urged people in the Territory to be generous in this time of desperate need by the people of East Timor.

He said Timor was such a close neighbor and he would like to think that something could be done from this end to help its people.

Bishop O'Loughlin said that providing help to Timor had been difficult in the past because of problems in the "distribution chain."

Timorese authorities had insisted that the Indonesians themselves distribute any aid through the local Red Cross.

### Possibility

National Director for Australian Catholic Relief, Mr Michael Whitely, said from Sydney this morning, his organisation would send as much as possible of the \$250 000 needed in East Timor.

"We have a prime responsibility to help the 500 000 people in Timor," he said.

"We will do whatever we can to raise the money needed.

"We expect a lot of the money will come in from overseas agencies as it has in the past."

Mr Whitely said the possibility of a famine in East Timor had been known for quite some time and a program had already been

co-ordinated in Jakarta by relief agencies.

He said Australian Catholic Relief would send at least \$90 000 as quickly as possible and probably would have lifted this to a total \$150 000 within the next 12 months.

It would seek backing from European relief agencies to meet the \$250 000 target.

"We have a strong obligation to help these people," Mr Whitely said.

Meanwhile, he has made a plea for Australian relief organisation representatives to be allowed into East Timor to see conditions for themselves.

The agencies then would be able to assess how they might co-operate in the establishment of normal living conditions there.

He was commenting on the reaction of Indonesian embassy officials who had admitted food shortages, but denied impending famine in East Timor.

"Many Australian aid agencies have been critical of Indonesian actions in East Timor solely because they saw the unnecessary suffering they were causing to the Timorese people," Mr Whitely said.

"We want to alleviate the suffering and it is our experience that the only way to do this is to embark on a long-term development program that will re-establish the agriculture sector and rebuild adequate medical facilities.



● Mr Wesley-Smith



● Bishop O'Loughlin