

×MPs seek Red Cross entry to Timor

Canberra Times 3/10/78

Seventy-six Federal politicians from all parties had signed a petition calling for the immediate admission of the International Red Cross to East Timor, a Tasmanian Liberal backbencher, Mr Hodgman, said yesterday.

Mr Hodgman, who prepared the petition, said it was being forwarded to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Waldheim.

A copy of the petition issued in Canberra reads, "We, the undersigned Members of the Parliament

of the Commonwealth of Australia humbly, but urgently, petition you as Secretary-General of the United Nations and all member nations to act immediately to facilitate the admission of Red Cross into East Timor along with such relief missions as deemed appropriate to immediately alleviate the present tragic hardship, suffering and loss of life".

Mr Hodgman said he believed more than 100 members would have signed the petition if more time had been available.

The question of Timor could be coming up in the UN General As-

sembly in the next week, and the petition had to be sent.

Mr Hodgman said, "Even so, the petition represents a very strong body of opinion within the Australian Parliament.

"It contains signatures of representatives of every political party in the Federal Parliament and one can appreciate the genuine concern about what has happened and is continuing to happen in East Timor.

"The United Nations has a duty to act positively and without delay in alleviating the present tragic hardship, suffering and loss of life.

"Either International Red Cross

or a United Nations relief team, including for example Australian Red Cross, should be admitted into East Timor forthwith".

Speaking from his home in the Tasmanian electorate of Denison, Mr Hodgman said he had deliberately avoided asking ministers to sign the petition, which began circulating last week.

However, he had told the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Peacock, of the petition and Mr Peacock's office had given advice on how to address it to Mr Waldheim.

Asked why the petition called

specifically for the admission of the Red Cross into East Timor when the Indonesian Red Crescent (the equivalent of the Red Cross) was already there, Mr Hodgman said, "I think it's self-evident". Questions had been raised about whether aid was getting through to the people who needed it, and up to 40,000 people were facing starvation.

Australia's recognition of the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia was a separate question, but he had made it clear before that he disagreed with the Government's decision.