

Australia-Timor-Leste Friendship Network

At the Australia-Timor-Leste Friendship Conference held in Dili in July 2008, delegates representing all Australia-Timor-Leste Friendship Groups unanimously decided to establish an Australia-wide Australia-Timor-Leste Friendship Network. That decision has now received the enthusiastic support of the Timor-Leste Minister for State Administration, Snr Archangelo Leite, on behalf of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

As a result of this agreement, reached on 6 July 2009, and following discussions with Australian peak bodies, Convener Rae Kingsbury has announced the establishment of the Australia-Timor-Leste Friendship Network (ATLFN).

The establishment of the ATLFN reflects the national spread of Australia-Timor-Leste Friendship Groups, the request by Friendship partners in Timor-Leste to establish some basic principles of operation, and a request on the part of the Government of Timor-Leste to coordinate Friendship activities through a common point of facilitation and communication.

The Australia-Timor-Leste Friendship Groups began in 2000 when the now Timor-Leste Consul-General to Sydney, Abel Guterres, approached then Cr Rae Perry (now Kingsbury) to help establish sister city relationships between Timor-Leste and Australia. It was decided that in order to build sustainable community to community relations the model of organisation should be 'Friendship' groups, engaging communities from Australia with communities in Timor-Leste.

Starting with just two Friendship Groups, they have now grown to be almost 50 such groups across Australia, establishing relationships with communities across Timor-Leste.

The principles informing the Friendship groups include respect and support for Timorese-led decision-making, sustainable and long-term (10 year) assistance, and that relationships are based on mutual respect and collaboration.

The ATLFN has agreement with the Government of Timor-Leste to work in close coordination to better facilitate the individual Friendship arrangements in alignment with Timor-Leste's plans for sustainable development. Following on from the work of founding Friendship Group members, the ATLFN has also agreed to explore with the Government of Timor-Leste and appropriate agencies opportunities for developing and extending programs including electoral observation, political training and support, and joint workshops and conferences.

The ATLFN looks forward to continuing its close and cooperative relationship with the Government of Timor-Leste, assisting and supporting the Australia-Timor-Leste Friendship Groups, and their partners in Timor-Leste.

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