

Foreword

The sixth UNITAR-IPS-JIIA Conference on peacekeeping focused on the experience and lessons learned from the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET).

UNTAET was selected as the theme of this meeting because of its peacekeeping mandate and also because in the history of the United Nations, it has thus far been the most comprehensive mission, involving the full administration of a territory and the creation of new institutions.

When UNTAET came into being, East Timor was in dire circumstances. Whatever institutions and resources had originally been available were no longer there and UNTAET had to react quickly and seek immediate solutions whilst planning for the long term. The total destruction of the physical infrastructure only added to the complications facing a UN administration tasked with restoring and maintaining peace and security, rebuilding administrative and civilian institutional capacities and conducting elections which would eventually lead to the formation of an independent state. The mission certainly benefited from the lessons learned in other complex UN missions in Cambodia and Kosovo, due to the far reaching experience of its dynamic head of mission, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

During the Tokyo conference, we were particularly interested in understanding and learning from the internal workings of UNTAET. Towards this end, we invited as many of the principal actors of the mission as possible, so as to gain a better understanding of the challenge of translating political will and policy into action. The conference participants were high in caliber and offered thoughtful insights and analysis of the various functions of the transitional administration. Their honest and candid remarks, we hope, have been captured in this book.

We have also attempted to complete the exercise by seeking the views of the East Timorese who ultimately had to live with the structures and processes that UNTAET created and left behind. Their presentations provided an excellent complement to the perspectives from the UN administration. Clearly, the level and extent of communication between the leaders and citizens of East Timor and the UN was not always adequate, but in many areas cooperation did in fact work well.

To fill in some gaps, we have commissioned additional papers to cover areas where the conference had no time to deal with in depth, such as the political process in Indonesia that led to its offer of independence for East Timor.

UNTAET was basically a successful exercise in restoring peace and building fundamental institutions for East Timor. We are, however, saddened by the events of November 2002 in Dili. The senseless destruction of property brought back bad memories of the destruction of East Timor by the militia. But the UN, though still involved, has in essence done its job; it is now up to the Timorese themselves to create a peaceful and prosperous society. These events underline, however, the difficult task of long-term peace and nation building. The international community has to accompany with vigilance and generosity the efforts of a population emerging from conflict to build itself again.

We wish to express our gratitude to the participants who made the Tokyo Conference a meaningful one by bringing their personal insights and an honest review of their efforts. We are grateful for the support we have received from our respective institutions, our governments and the many friends and allies of East Timor around the world.

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