

Book launch of *Strategies for the Future* by Xanana Gusmao

Victoria University, 300 Flinders St, Melbourne.

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Pat Walsh

Chancellor Pappas and friends, including any members of the Carrascalao family who are present – to you my sincere condolences on the recent passing of Joao Viegas Carrascalao.

Mr Prime Minister: I am truly honoured and delighted to have been invited to launch your book *Strategies for the Future* this afternoon. Thank you very much. May I also say that Victoria University is a most appropriate venue for this event. Thanks to the extraordinary work done over many years by some remarkable individuals, not least Helen Hill and Jean McLean, VU has become a powerhouse of support for Timor-Leste and is the perfect launching pad for your book. Mr Prime Minister, powered by its VU rockets, may your book fly high and far and generate much positive fallout over a very wide area.

We all know that there are some high-level job vacancies coming up in Timor-Leste and that Timorese have a genius for conspiracy theorising. So I'd better make it clear from the start that my comments this afternoon are not political. Of course I will be a very interested observer of the coming elections but, not being Timorese, I am not on the selection panel and am not a member of the Xanana Gusmao team success.

If I were voting, however, I would be very focussed on an issue close to my heart. This is whether the main contenders will give their support, now and in the future, to legislation currently before the Timor-Leste Parliament to follow up recommendations from Timor-Leste's two truth commissions. This legislation is to establish an Institute of Memory that in addition to activities such as memorialisation and education of the young about the sacrifices made for them in the past, will assist families to find their missing/disappeared and will address the rights and needs of Timor's most vulnerable civilian war victims. As President Ramos-Horta observed this week, this legislation is overdue. After working in Timor-Leste for over a decade on these issues, wonderfully supported by you Mr Prime Minister in one or other capacity, I am convinced that this legislation is in the national interest and offers a constructive and practical way forward for the Parliament and the Government. With others, I very much hope it will be enacted soon.

I have been actively associated with our guest of honour for many years and so much has happened in that time that I am perplexed about what to say in the brief time available. I proudly admit, however, to leaving no stone unturned to promote him especially during the 10 year period 1989-1999. Here are a few snippets.

With ACFOA I published Robert Domm's ground-breaking interview conducted with Xanana in the mountains of occupied Timor in 1989. This was done (a) to give him and the resistance exposure at a time when he was not widely known and officials in Australia and elsewhere insisted that Indonesia's takeover was irreversible, and (b) to publicise his surprise offer to negotiate a solution with Indonesia under UN auspices.

We did this by getting many prominent Australians to join an *East Timor Talks Campaign*. After his arrest and trial we published his defence plea in *Inside Indonesia*, sneaked paints and brushes into Cipinang prison in Jakarta then smuggled out and auctioned his paintings, got a nervous UN Association of Australia to give him its human rights award in 1993, and that same year plastered small stickers proclaiming *Free Xanana Free East Timor* all around the World Congress of Human Rights in Vienna. This included putting these stickers on the backs of doors in the men's toilets in official sections of the congress centre in the hope that we'd upset Indonesian diplomats when they closed the door and sat down.

Most years he was in jail, we celebrated his birthday in as public a way as possible, in his absence displaying the photo of him wearing an Aussie slouch on a table beside his birthday cake. Of course I'd never met him but we knew we were on a sure thing, a sort of Timorese Black Caviar, when the Sydney Morning Herald wrote in an editorial in 1993: *'The majority view is that rather than being jailed, Xanana Gusmao should be applauded for his struggle in defence of the East Timorese people. He is a Nelson Mandela figure'*.

I didn't meet him till 1999 but I talked to him in jail by phone about 1994 from Kirsty's flat in Jakarta. I recall feeling so star-struck and guilty (I was technically committing a crime and worried he'd get into trouble) that I didn't know what to say. Subsequently my main association with Xanana related to CAVR during the five years that he was President.

What have I concluded about Xanana Gusmao from all this?

The best way I can communicate my considered judgment is to quote Dag Hammarskjold, the remarkable Swedish international public servant and former Secretary-General of the UN. Hammarskjold wrote in his diary *Markings*:

'I inherited a belief that no life was more satisfactory than one of selfless service to your country – or humanity. Love finds natural expression in an unhesitant fulfilment of duty and an unreserved acceptance of life, whatever it brings personally of toil, suffering – or happiness'.

That I think captures the essence of Xanana and is the foundation of his exceptional dedication and vision.

It is now my great pleasure to declare the book launched and in doing so to express the hope Mr Prime Minister that when you eventually retire from office you will do a Dag Hammarskjold and write your reflections on your extraordinary life. That will be really something to look forward to and a gift to us all.

Thank you.

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