

OBRIGADU BARAK!

The Newsletter of the Seattle East Timor Relief Association
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Timor Leste Suffers Ongoing Violence

Sadly, since our last newsletter in May, Timor Leste has continued to suffer periodic internal violence, political upheaval, and tremendous displacement of the population. Those of us on the Board of SETRA have heavy hearts when faced with the reality that all the hope and promise of independence has been overshadowed by such difficulties. Since we are not experts in all the factors that have contributed to this disturbing situation, we've found some resources helpful in trying to understand it, and we wanted to share them with those of you who care about the country and its people. Australian media tend to carry breaking news, since the Australian military is currently the primary peacekeeping force present in the country. Australian Broadcasting Company – ABC – has a website at www.abc.net.au/ and the Sydney Morning Herald is at www.smh.com.au/. Also, The Age, another Australian daily, has news at www.theage.com.au. ETAN, at www.etan.org, has [Timor Postings](#) near the bottom of the home page. It is news, analysis, documents, links and reports from worldwide sources that is updated weekly. Also the BBC, www.news.bbc.co.uk/ occasionally has very interesting extended radio segments on East Timor on its various radio shows (which can be tough to search, though). We find it easiest and most comprehensive to simply go to Google News, www.news.google.com for recent newspaper stories. Just type "East Timor" in the search engine.

These trying times only highlight the ongoing need for development work in Timor, and your donations are needed more than ever to help support SETRA health and education projects.



Patient at HIAM Health Program, photo from www.hiamhealth.org

SETRA Member Back at HIAM Health

The violence in East Timor presented a major setback for HIAM Health, one of the two recipients of SETRA's donations. The staff hunkered down as visits slowed to a trickle. The clinic's regular clientele were fearful of venturing outside their homes or had left Dili to escape the mayhem. In May, Jill, the clinic's advisor and manager, was ordered back to Australia. HIAM and its programs were in danger of becoming another casualty of the violence.

By early June the situation had improved somewhat and long time SETRA member Megan Lavelle was asked by HIAM's manager to meet back in Dili to help reestablish the program. Megan was approached because she had worked with the clinic on a prior visit to East Timor and had developed working relationships with the staff. With language skills and educational background in maternal health care, Megan is well suited. She bravely accepted and arrived in Dili on June 23.

Here are some excerpts of emails from Megan:

June 30

Dear All,

Hello from Dili! Things have been relatively calm here. The fence that SETRA provided has protected the HIAM gardens, and those gardens have helped to feed the approx. 20 of us living out of the HIAM offices.

HIAM is assisting the Ministry of health in carrying out immunization campaigns in the refugee camps since this crisis developed. We are working with the hospital administration to organize hygiene classes for the children in the hospital refugee camps.

We still watch the fires of houses burning from the hospital grounds, but there hasn't been an influx of wounded into the hospital yet, and things seem to be getting under control. I just wanted to let you know that we're safe, and HIAM is still up and running (although slowly) and serving the people of East Timor.



Rosaria Martins da Cruz, HIAM Health Director, teaches a class on Malaria
photo from www.hiamhealth.org

July 21

Hello from Dili! Aside from suffering terrible email withdrawal, I'm doing quite well. Jill and I were refugees in the hospital for about a week when we arrived (I even have the official refugee card). Our living conditions were much better than those of the real refugees—instead of the UNHCR tents, we were able to sleep in the HIAM office on a roll up mattress. Of course, there were about 20 of us living out of the HIAM offices for a while.

The sister of one of the HIAM staff and her family lived here for quite a while, moving to a new location just a few days ago. Her house was looted completely by neighbors, and when the staff member and her sister went to get a few things from the house (before the looting), they were stopped by men intending to kill them.

Fortunately, our staff member is well-known, and she shamed the men and they were allowed to pass safely. The staff member's house was only looted. Yet she and her family can't move back home, at least yet, because her husband is Lorosae (from the East) and they live in a Loromonu (West) area. The chefe du suco (village chief) said that Rita and the kids could return, but that there would be too much trouble for her husband to return, and he wouldn't allow it.

We moved into the hospital when things got bad for a couple of reasons. If we were going to be trapped inside somewhere because of violence on the street, we'd better be at HIAM and at the Hospital where we could do the work we came to do. After the first outbreak of violence, a HIAM staff member was trapped at the hospital because it was unsafe to return home. Many of the hospital employees fled, but she found herself working in the hospital with the hospital director and a few doctors with no nursing staff, standing in blood and among dead bodies. The director told her to put on a nurse's uniform—she was all they had. She did, and went to assist the doctors. So, if we were to be trapped somewhere, we wanted to be at the hospital where so much help was needed.

The hospital is a refugee camp anyway, is pretty well surrounded with a sturdy wall, and it is guarded by Australian army around the clock. The increased security was more than welcome. We had a few scares here and houses were burned across the street from the hospital, so we were glad to be on the military's radar screen in times of trouble. If things did get terrible, it would have been much better to be trapped on the hospital grounds with the army, refugees, and protected grounds than to be alone in our little compound in Taibessi (safe as it has been).

Taibessi is where the burning started. Those of you familiar with Dili will remember the Taibessi market. It was razed to the ground. A few shops near the front have started up again, but the expanse of the market is char and debris. However, Taibessi has a strong chefe and the men of the area have organized themselves into security patrols. (Granted, one man's security patrol is another man's roving gang.) We haven't had any burning or violence in our area aside from the markets. The army also conducts frequent patrols of the streets during the day and night, and they come through our area in those patrols.

The shops around town are up and running again, which is fantastic. Many are even still open during lunch time (between noon and about 3pm) which is usually treated as a siesta. Microlets are running, and people are back out on the streets. Patients are starting to filter back into our offices, but most have not. We've placed radio ads to let patients in the districts know that HIAM's services are up and running. Hopefully, not too many have died in the meantime.

There are still many refugees living here at the hospital. The looting of a house often includes everything down to the electrical wiring and windows. So a looted house isn't always much better than a burnt house. Even those with homes to return to face difficulties. Families are being divided here—a spouse from the "wrong" area is just too much risk for the security of the neighborhood because people know that there will be retaliation of some kind against that person. Many people are still very afraid. They simply can't go home.



A child served by HIAM Health, photo from www.hiamhealth.org

The problem is complicated by the fact that getting people out of the refugee camps is highly desirable. First, because the potential for disease outbreak is high. We've had some cases of chicken pox in various camps, and there's always concern about cholera. Diarrhea did break out for a while. People are getting settled in here. Agricultural folk haven't been able to keep up their work at home, and food may become an issue. But here, people have food security.

They have shops out of their tents. The shops used to be out in the open until the military enforced the hospital rules against selling goods in the camp. People go to work and school during the day, and they return here in the evenings.

And, of course, it is difficult to move forward from this chapter until people return to more normal patterns. Of course, returning to a normal pattern of life isn't possible while there's fear and revenge. So it's a difficult cycle. Nothing is simple or right, but we trudge through the best we can.



Mothers receive breastfeeding education at HIAM, photo from www.hiamhealth.org

HIAM has been working with the Ministry of Health on a number of fronts. Our staff was doing immunizations in the camps for a long while. We're working on proposals and strategic plans for our Malnutrition Rehabilitation Centre proposal. I'm very excited with the proposal, and I think it will set a replicable and necessary model of malnutrition rehabilitation in Southeast Asia.

July 31

All is well here-- we had a couple of guys come into the Emergency room yesterday after beating each other senseless with large sticks in the Comoro Market, and there was an incident the other night where about 30 guys started hurling rocks at some Australian military on patrol, but it's been really calm in general.

August 15

It has been a huge setback and issue of concern that our regular patients haven't had the usual access to our services because of the problems in Dili. HIAM is one of three organizations (UNICEF, CARE, and HIAM) --and the only Timorese NGO--that worked on a rapid assessment severe malnutrition survey in the refugee camps.

On July 28, the army moved out of the hospital and left security to the hospital security guards. Before, the army lived there--tents, showers, meals, etc. They still check in sometimes, but it was a stressful time for everyone when they left. They're meant to be weaning folks off of their presence and letting the Timorese come to the fore, but the refugees were really quite frightened about the possibilities.

There's been some minor fighting in the interim, but things seem to be looking up. The gang leaders are being supportive of the

reconciliation process, and there's hope for the future. We're bound to have more trouble here and there, but we'll deal with that as it comes.

Sept. 14

One of our long-time staff members and nurse had a beautiful baby girl yesterday. Mother and baby are healthy, happy, and generally fabulous! I even got to carry her from the observation room to her mother's room! It was wonderful to meet someone so new in the world.

Security concerns continue around Dili. You've probably read about the shootings at the refugee camp in front of Hotel Timor (there's a lovely large bullet hole in the glass next to the Hotel's front door). We had a pretty bad week of rock throwing at the hospital, even sometimes starting up in the afternoon (usually, these things go on after dark). And all of the refugee camp areas are listed as danger spots in UN and security emails. I don't think the situation has changed fundamentally.

HIAM is still working well. Education programs are running weekly and patients are still coming in, despite the security concerns about the hospital. We're also still full steam ahead in trying to secure major funding for the new Malnutrition Rehabilitation Center (MRC). It's non-stop work, but when this comes to fruition, it'll be amazing.

Please give my very best wishes to everyone!
Megan

We look forward to more updates from Megan as the days go by, and are thrilled to have someone who can send us news of our friends and projects from Dili. We hope with your help HIAMHealth can continue to provide assistance to the poorest people in East Timor for years to come.

Kay Rala Celebrates Graduation!



Students concentrate on their final examinations in July

The good news is that Kay Rala Secundaria in Manatuto has escaped the violence and disruption that have been mostly confined to Dili. Less than 60 miles away,

Manatuto has experienced no significant impact from the upheaval, and life continues more or less as normal. The graduating class of seniors finished their final exams in July and the new school year started again in late August

Kay Rala has added 150 new students this school year, increasing the census at the school to 500 students. **SETRA's goal each year is to be able to provide scholarships for 100 students. So far, we have gotten donations to support 5 students for the 2006-2007 school year, so we need your help to meet the goal.** We think education is one of the keys to building a unified and peaceful nation, and to help overcome the effects of so many years of turmoil and devastating hardship.

Our friend Victor Soares, Public Relations Director for Kay Rala school, sends us updates and photos about the student's progress every couple of months. He sent these photos in early August, along with the captions. Victor's English is sometimes rough, but our Tetun is so poor that we appreciate his efforts to keep us informed about the students and their progress.



"Parents of students were attending meeting in Kay Rala High School to hear the result of the last examination for this school year. All of them very satisfied with the result because their child had passed their examination for this school year."

Please consider supporting a student (or two!) for the coming school year. For \$40 a year, you will be helping to provide teacher salaries, books, supplies, and a whole new world of possibilities to students who live in this small agricultural town. Many of Kay Rala's graduates will be eligible to attend the University of Dili, or a university in Indonesia, Brazil, Portugal, Australia, or many other countries that have contracts to accept students supported by grants from the central

government of Timor Leste. Your gift is essential to helping the nation build a hopeful future.

If you are interested, we can arrange for you to correspond with the student(s) you sponsor at Kay Rala Secundaria. Please complete the form in this newsletter to sponsor a student with a scholarship for 2006-07.



"Our thanks a lot to Mr. Joe, Debra and all Nova students that had worked hard to collect money to pay our fee school in Kay Rala. All of us very happy because we were passed for this year!"



Kay Rala students watch "Tears of the Crocodile" on their tiny TV/VCR, purchased with funds from SETRA