

## **Stories from Ainaro: our first sister city delegation**

by Diane Farsetta

This summer, three members of East Timor *Action* Network/Madison traveled to our East Timor sister city, Ainaro. For nearly a month, Tom Foley, Mike Iltis and myself met with community leaders, distributed aid supplies, assisted with reconstruction projects, and asked many people what they wanted the future of our sister city relationship to look like. It was the first time any of us had been to Ainaro, a beautiful, isolated region in the country's mountainous interior.

The main goal of our delegation was to build relationships and work with the community to identify future projects. We brought hand tools, medicines and some money. Although ETAN/Madison had worked to form a sister city relationship for more than two years, we still had many questions, both for our Ainaro partners and ourselves: Who should we talk to? How could we strengthen local initiatives, and avoid the mistakes other well-meaning foreigners had made? What useful work could we do while there?

Luckily, others helped us. Jen Laakso, a former Madisonian now studying East Timor's reconciliation process at the University of Queensland, Australia, explained our intentions to Ainaro residents before our arrival. Members of the Ballarat (Australia)-Ainaro "friendship city" group shared their experiences, ideas and contacts. Other Madison sister city organizations briefed us on the power and potential pitfalls of this work. Dr. Dan Murphy at Bairo Pite clinic, friends at La'o Hamutuk monitoring organization, and Yohan with Bibi Bulak theater group, all in the capital city of Dili, welcomed us to East Timor and introduced us to more allies.

It was an important time to stress that our organization, though small, is committed to an ongoing, mutually beneficial relationship with Ainaro. East Timor had celebrated its independence in May, and seen the exodus of most international staff shortly thereafter. Although a festive mood still lingered, many people saw the daunting tasks ahead and felt overwhelmed and abandoned by the United Nations. It was easy to understand this sentiment: nearly half the houses in Ainaro remain uninhabitable; many schools are without roofs, windows, doors, desks, chairs, and supplies; health clinics are few and lack medicines or trained personnel; and many residents have yet to return from militia-controlled refugee camps in Indonesian West Timor.

Although the needs are great, we also learned how Ainaro is helping itself. Canossian Sisters bring a free mobile health clinic to surrounding villages. Local youth, women's and Church groups were about to open Centro Comunidade Ainaro, to provide community space, sports activities for youth, and training in computers, language and technical skills. Women's organizations continue their adult literacy and income-generation programs. Newer community efforts assist orphans, and support and improve local agriculture.

We ended our delegation with a long list of potential projects, which we have since refined to initial focuses on agriculture and education. Now comes the real work: building the support here needed to make things happen!

## ***Bemvindu! Welcome to Ainaro***

by Diane Farsetta

Ainaro is the name of a district, a sub-district and a town in East Timor. Districts are analogous to U.S. states; there are 13 districts in East Timor. Ainaro district is in the southwest of the country. It boasts many streams, fertile land and rugged terrain, including East Timor's highest peak, Mount Ramelau. Historically, Ainaro played an important role during the brutal Indonesian occupation of East Timor, providing shelter for the mountain-based guerrilla resistance army. Former guerrilla leader and current President Xanana Gusmão spent many years directing the resistance from Ainaro.

Ainaro sub-district has a population of approximately 12,000 people. Ainaro town, the district capital, lies within Ainaro sub-district, along with the villages of Soro, Maununo, Cassa, Suro Craic, Manutassi, and Mau-Ulo.

The Catholic Church dominates the physical landscape of Ainaro town, and the social landscape of the entire district. Priests and Canossian Sisters run the local private Catholic school system. Throughout the district, the Church supports a network of catechists and lay religious groups, like Foinsae Catholic (FOSCA). The Church is very well respected and an important part of most people's lives. Church-led reconciliation efforts, free mobile health clinics, and support for orphans help address major community needs. And because of its international ties and institutional respectability, the Church helps funnel support from aid agencies and foreign individuals to local communities across East Timor.

Ainaro town houses the district government. Local officials were very accessible to us *malaes* (white foreigners), from the district administrator to local ministers of health, education, agriculture, and development. We were given copies of the district development plan and encouraged to help in whatever way we could. Many local government officials told us that the national government ignores Ainaro. They were not hopeful of seeing government-led improvement and had been let down by numerous international aid agencies.

The relationship between East Timorese and their local government seemed somewhat ambiguous. The World Bank Community Empowerment Project (CEP), in which communities elect local representatives to decide funding priorities, appeared not to have communicated its goals well. One woman we met whose aunt was part of the local CEP council told us that the project was finished. The World Bank, however, considers CEP an ongoing effort whose aim is to eventually transform the CEP councils into democratic, functional local government bodies. Instead, village leadership is usually vested in traditional leaders, called *liurais* or *chefe do sucos*, whose family members frequently occupy positions of influence. We found this to be true even in areas where the *chefe* was aligned with the Indonesian military and its militia groups in 1999.

Perhaps the most exciting community effort we saw during our visit was Centro Comunidade Ainaro, a joint effort by the Catholic group FOSCA, a youth group (Juventudi Ramelau Ainaro), and the women's group Organização Mulher de Timor (OMT). These organizations were readying to open the renovated community center to offer organized sports activities for local youth, basic computer education, language classes, and carpentry workshops. OMT was planning to open a restaurant in the building, to provide income for the center and for their own work. We have since heard from friends in Ainaro that the Centro Comunidade opened in November.

Women's organizations in Ainaro include OMT and Organização Popular Mulher de Timor (OPMT, which spawned the similarly-named OMT after being banned during the Indonesian occupation). These two groups work separately and together to carry out adult literacy, sewing and weaving projects. More than 20 local women had organized a cooperative independent of these organizations to produce and sell traditional weavings called *tais* in area markets.

Other Ainaro community groups include those focused on agriculture, domestic violence and veterans' issues. Although it took a while to even begin to understand who was doing what, our gentle persistence and Church backing eventually paid off. By the time we left Ainaro, we knew that there are many wonderful local partners for the sister-city projects we are pursuing here. And any "first-world" notion of a helpless people dependant on foreign assistance was roundly dispelled.

### **Planting Links with Ainaro**

by Tom Foley

Agricultural rehabilitation and expansion are needed for Ainaro's reconstruction and the opportunity to build a stable future. Agriculture, the most important economic sector in East Timor, was hard hit by the Indonesian military's massive scorched-earth destruction in late 1999. Most farmers lost not only their homes, but also their tools, seed stores and livestock. The government's Ainaro district development plan prioritizes agriculture, but – as officials and local citizens repeatedly pointed out to us – the resources available for these efforts are woefully inadequate.

Even more than other districts in East Timor, Ainaro relies upon agriculture. Most of the population of Ainaro live in rural areas and engage in small scale and subsistence farming of corn, rice, vegetables, trees and livestock. Ainaro also lies within the mountainous region producing East Timor's high quality, organic shade-grown arabica and robusta coffee. Coffee, which is currently East Timor's only resource exported on a commercial scale, is expected to continue to be an important export crop for Ainaro and the country in general. However, many have expressed concern at plans emphasizing cash crops for export at the expense of food self-sufficiency, especially given the current worldwide overproduction of coffee and subsequent low price farmers receive for even organic, high quality beans like those from East Timor.

Although Ainaro has fertile soil and a climate much better for agriculture than the north coast's dry tropical heat, local markets had few fresh vegetables or leafy greens; only dry beans, corn and rice were plentiful. From discussions with farmers, the district agricultural officer and others, we learned that this lack of variety was due to limited access to seeds and other basic agricultural tools. The implications are serious – malnutrition and child mortality rates in East Timor are among the highest in the world; last year the United Nations found that nearly one-half of East Timorese routinely go hungry.

But everything is not bleak; a climate that can grow an abundance of food, government priorities of health, agriculture and education and the fact that "organically grown" is the norm rather than the exception all work to East Timor's advantage. With a little assistance, the people of Ainaro can prosper. Increased availability of credit, heirloom seeds, strong agriculture education support, improved access to transportation, and fair trade arrangements could have a great impact. Many farmers currently use labor-intensive and environmentally unfriendly traditional farming practices, and could substantially improve crop yields with

better quality seeds, a few tools and organic fertilizer. Practices like burning organic materials and short rotation cropping need to be discouraged to help soil conservation. Forests must be replanted to reduce erosion problems and to provide wood for building and cooking.

As part of our sister city relationship, we have decided to make agriculture one of our initial major focuses. We are working to build support here to provide Ainaro farmers with high quality seeds; hand tools such as rakes, hoes, machetes and shovels; and multi-language informational posters on subjects including organic fertilizer production and other sustainable farming methods. These are goals that we in the more affluent parts of the world can meet with a few thousand dollars; yet these relatively small efforts will make a substantial difference for people in Ainaro.

Centuries of colonial neglect and decades of terror under military occupation have left wounds in East Timor that will take a long time to heal. The ability to meet basic needs, including growing a variety of high-quality food crops sufficient to nourish one's family and bring in some money for school and health fees, will help facilitate the healing.

### **Reading, Writing and Arithmetic: *Edukasaun* in Ainaro**

by Eric S. Piotrowski

The thoroughness of the Indonesian military's tidal wave of destruction in 1999 took a devastating toll on the educational institutions of East Timor, and Ainaro was no exception.

All of the schools in Ainaro were destroyed or heavily damaged in 1999. Nearly half of the district's elementary schools have not been rehabilitated. The World Bank school rehabilitation program runs until 2015, and even then not all schools will be fixed. Many children attend schools without doors, windows, desks, chairs, toilets and wash facilities. Most teachers have little or no training; no Ainaro district instructors passed a May 2002 national teaching exam. There is only one public high school in the district. Many children (especially orphans) do not attend school because they cannot afford the few dollars per month charged by public schools. Private schools run by the Catholic Church are better equipped, but their fees – \$10 a month in Ainaro – make this option inaccessible to most East Timorese.

Therefore, we have highlighted education in Ainaro as a top priority for our work. We've been in touch with a number of charitable and education-based organizations in the Madison area, and we hope to work with them to raise funds for education in Ainaro. Our main education project goal at this time is the provision of funds for in-country scholarships for elementary through high school. Through this program, we hope to make education more accessible for Ainaro youth, and also help build up local schools.

To this end, we are working to build coalitions of support with groups like WEAC, MTI and other local education-based institutions. We are also working to sponsor fundraising drives at Madison-area schools, so that schoolchildren here can help make a basic education affordable for kids in Ainaro.

Access to primary and secondary school is not the only educational need in East Timor. Many people spoke of the need for applied learning programs in Ainaro, especially in agriculture, mechanics, construction and forestry. There are only two technical education programs in East Timor, in the cities of Dili and Baucau; both are on East Timor's north coast, far from Ainaro.

Therefore, we also hope to eventually expand our education project to include support for adult literacy and vocational/technical training. The Centro Comunidade, Ainaro's community center, is already spearheading some programs in these fields. During our delegation, we were able to donate hand tools and give a small grant to establish woodworking classes in the center; we hope to continue and enlarge our support in the future.

## **A Health Journal from Ainaro**

by Mike Iltis

When we departed from East Timor's capital city, Dili, for Ainaro, two medical workers volunteering at the Bairo Pite clinic came with us: Scottish MD Audrey Banks and Nina Soares, an Ainaro native who had completed two years of medical school in Indonesia during the occupation. When we arrived in Ainaro, one of the first things we were told by local officials was that no doctor had been to the area for the previous eight months. Health was a main topic of discussion; it had just been learned that the hospital in the southwest of the country would not be built in Ainaro, as previously promised, but in Maubisse – a more affluent town some two and a half hours away over difficult mountain roads. Driving over those difficult roads at night to get to Ainaro had made one of Tom's wrists badly swell up. To one seriously ill, the ride could kill.

The Portuguese-built hospital in Ainaro and most area clinics were destroyed in 1999 by the Indonesian military and its militias. Most have not been rebuilt, and there are no plans or resources to do so. There is not enough money to keep the 37 nurses then working across the district, though even this level was not sufficient to reach all the larger villages. Common medical problems include malaria, diarrhea and coughing illnesses such as tuberculosis and viral pneumonia. Maternal and child illness and malnutrition are also serious problems, especially in more rural areas. During our month in Ainaro, we saw three funeral processions for children and met many orphans.

Our trips to smaller villages surrounding Ainaro town uncovered even greater needs. Health clinics, when present, were seriously run down and often had roofs that we were told leaked badly during the rainy season (roughly October through April). "Mobile clinics," where health care workers walk to isolated villages carrying bags of frequently-needed medicines, were greeted by long lines of mostly women and children. People patiently waited for hours to spend a few minutes with a visiting MD (such as Audrey), or, more frequently, an East Timorese nurse or nun with a few years' training in nursing school.

Cassa village stood out for a number of reasons. In 1999, it was the headquarters for the vicious MAHIDI militia (an acronym for *Life or Death with Indonesia* and a tribute to Indonesian Major General Mahidin Simbolon, who played a major role in setting up the militias). After East Timor's vote for independence, the entire town was forcibly displaced to militia-run "refugee" camps in Indonesian West Timor. More than one thousand Cassa residents have yet to return home. Those who have often carry illnesses from the squalid West Timor camps. Although they are free in Ainaro, their health needs often go unmet; the entire medicine stocks at the local clinic's pharmacy could be contained in one shoebox. When we met with the *chefe do suco* during our second visit to Cassa, we were told that his son had recently died from malaria. Some effort was being made to improve conditions in the village, though; an Irish aid organization was finishing a

project to provide the village with fresh, clean water. Some 70 percent of people in Ainaro district do not have access to drinkable water.

My personal experience in Ainaro also made me reflect upon the lack of medical services there, and the standards many in the U.S. (including myself) take for granted. I accepted an offer to have a traditional healer look at my back, which had been bothering me. The treatment, which I was told was for sore muscles but not structural problems, consisted of a topical ointment with betelnut juice, chewing on bark and resting. Unfortunately, I didn't see much improvement after the healer's treatment, and the bumpy bus ride from Ainaro back to Dili was rather painful. Feeling the cumulative effects of bad roads and other minor hardships on my health made me begin to understand how health problems are compounded by many seemingly unrelated conditions. Efficient transportation, communication systems, pest control, adequate food, clean water, shelter and even family support structures are often out of reach for people in Ainaro. To build a really healthy community, all these needs must be addressed.

### **A Doctor in East Timor visits Madison**

Dr. Dan Murphy, director of the Bairo Pite clinic in Dili, East Timor, visited Madison on January 7 as part of a worldwide speaking and fundraising tour. Dr. Murphy, who has volunteered his services in East Timor since 1998, spoke to some 50 people assembled at Black Walnut Co-op about his experience treating East Timorese patients over the years. During 1998 and 1999 (the end of the illegal Indonesian military occupation), most patients needed treatment for gunshot and machete wounds. Now, tuberculosis, malaria, maternal illness and other preventable illnesses predominate.

Bairo Pite clinic is one of very few free clinics in East Timor, and it sees some 400 patients a day. Bairo Pite is also remarkable for its emphasis on training East Timorese paramedical, nursing and support staff, many of whom have been unable to continue their schooling since 1999. The clinic runs an acute care hospital as well as maternity and long-stay tuberculosis wards, and does outreach and health education work in villages around East Timor, including Ainaro.

ETAN/Madison has a long-time relationship with Dr. Murphy through our Medical Aid East Timor project. We were very happy to be able to raise more than \$2000 for the Bairo Pite clinic during Dr. Murphy's Madison visit, and thank all who donated and attended his talk! To make sure you know about upcoming events, please contact us at [madison@etan.org](mailto:madison@etan.org) or 608-663-5431. To get involved with our Medical Aid East Timor project, contact Mike at [mgiltis@hotmail.com](mailto:mgiltis@hotmail.com) or 608-257-4551.

## **The Madison-Ainaro Sister City relationship: the next steps**

In considering which projects our sister city relationship with Ainaro should undertake, we decided to abide by the following guidelines:

- We will support existing community efforts in Ainaro, rather than try to start new projects. This will maximize our effectiveness, and ensure that our work respects the wishes, priorities and norms of the community.
- We will start with a small focus, both geographically and project-wise. We will work in Ainaro sub-district, comprised of Ainaro town and six surrounding villages, on one or two projects. This will allow us to focus limited resources, and allow both Ainaro and Madison to see real results from our work.
- We will maximize our outreach efforts in Madison, informing and encouraging other organizations and institutions with relevant expertise to become involved with our sister city project. This will broaden our knowledge and resource base, and make our sister city project a true community-to-community effort.

We have decided to begin work on sister city projects in education and agriculture, which were consistently identified as the highest priority areas by government, Church and community representatives. In addition, they are areas in which we could support existing community structures and efforts, and benefit from strong local partners.

### Education

- *Scholarships* – Scholarships for Ainaro students to attend local primary and secondary schools, Dili and Baucau technical schools, the University of East Timor, and U.S. universities. Scholarships to schools in East Timor have the advantage of building up local infrastructure, being practical for more people, and costing less. Scholarships to U.S. universities would provide students with advanced knowledge in areas not easily studied in East Timor, such as medicine. Establishing scholarships for orphans would provide much-needed opportunities for traumatized and marginalized children.
- *Vocational/Technical Training* – Local classes in carpentry, motorcycle and auto mechanics, masonry and other skills. We were able to provide tools and funding for Centro Comunidade Ainaro to begin woodworking classes, but other tools, resources and training of instructors are needed for Ainaro's physical and economic reconstruction.

### Agriculture

- *Seeds and Hand Tools* – In-kind donations of appropriate seeds and hand tools. Most Ainaro residents engage in agriculture, and the soil and climate make agricultural production a key to future economic development in the area. However, access to quality seeds and tools is limited in East Timor.
- *Training and Information* – Training workshops, pilot projects and informational pamphlets stressing sustainable agriculture practices. Farmers use traditional agricultural methods, which are often very labor intensive and not environmentally friendly. For example, organic waste is routinely burned instead of composted.

During our delegation to Ainaro, we were fortunate to meet with many individuals who were very generous with their time and information. With the help of these community members, we were able to identify project areas for our sister city relationship. Although we at times felt overwhelmed – there are so many

needs and we are a small organization – we were encouraged by the energy and vision of our partners in Ainaro.

Although information gathering was the focus of the delegation, we feel other important goals were also accomplished. These included providing hundreds of dollars in medicines free to local clinics; giving Centro Comunidade Ainaro thousands of dollars' worth of tools, for woodworking classes; providing small grants to women's income-generating and adult literacy projects, local scholarships for orphans, and struggling elementary schools; working with area schoolchildren to construct tables and chairs for their school; and, most importantly, making friends.

We certainly have our work cut out for us. But we look forward to joining with others in Madison and Ainaro, and working together for positive change in both our communities.

### **How you can get involved**

- *Come to a meeting!* We meet on the first and third Thursdays of each month at 7:30 pm at the UW Memorial Union (see TITU for room location). Help in planning and organizing events, doing outreach and building support is always needed and appreciated.
- *Contact us for more information!* You can call us at 608-663-5431, email us at [madison@etan.org](mailto:madison@etan.org) or get more information from our local website [www.aideasttimor.org](http://www.aideasttimor.org) and/or from the ETAN/U.S. national website, [www.etan.org](http://www.etan.org).
- *Help us do outreach to other groups!* Know of a community organization, classroom or religious group that may be interested in learning about our sister city efforts? We would love to talk with them and show them slides from our delegation to Ainaro. Let us know at 608-663-5431 or [madison@etan.org](mailto:madison@etan.org).
- *Donate in support of our sister city projects!* Checks can be made out to "ETAN/Madison", with "Ainaro" in the memo line, and mailed to ETAN, 1202 Williamson St, Madison, WI 53703. \$5 provides a student with needed school supplies; \$30 prints informational agricultural posters for posting throughout Ainaro; \$60 pays a student's public school fees for one year; and more can do more!

### **Enjoy East Timorese coffee!**

*Just Coffee* is a new, Madison-based effort to support small coffee farmers and cooperatives around the world and raise awareness of Fair Trade coffee, which ensures farmers have greater control over conditions and wages. And *Just Coffee* has Fair Trade, organic East Timorese coffee! You can contact them at 608-204-9011, see their website at [www.justcoffee.net](http://www.justcoffee.net) or stop by their office at 100 South Baldwin St, Suite 303, Madison, WI 53703.

### **Upcoming events**

Thursday, April 6 at 7:30 pm – UW Memorial Union (TITU) – *Four Months in an Indonesian Jail Cell*; Iowan nurse and international human rights activist Joy Lee Sadler speaks about being imprisoned for trying to provide health care to refugees in the conflict area of Aceh, Indonesia. While she and a Scottish colleague were held incommunicado, sexually and physically assaulted and otherwise harassed by Indonesian officials, U.S. authorities claimed everything was all right. Joy has also volunteered at the Bairo Pite clinic in Dili, East Timor. For more information call 608-663-5431 or email [madison@etan.org](mailto:madison@etan.org).

Sunday, September 21 at 1 pm – Law Park near Monona Terrace on Madison’s near east side – the third *Tour de Timor* bike ride fundraiser! Come join us in a bike ride around Lake Monona and help raise funds for our sister city projects. Pledge forms available at [www.aideasttimor.org](http://www.aideasttimor.org), or call Mike at 608-257-4551.

### **More about the Madison-Ainaro Sister City Alliance**

The Madison-Ainaro Sister City Alliance is an active project of the East Timor *Action* Network/Madison. For more information, contact us at [madison@etan.org](mailto:madison@etan.org), 608-663-5431 or see our website at [www.aideasttimor.org](http://www.aideasttimor.org). We periodically produce the *Lia-Foun* newsletter as a way to inform the Madison community about our activities. Comments, suggestions and offers of help are always welcome!

Our goals are outlined in our mission statement (which refers to East Timor as Timor Loro Sa’e, the indigenous name for the country):

*We, the residents of Madison, would like to extend our solidarity work in partnership with the people of Timor Loro Sa’e by declaring Ainaro a sister city of Madison. The indomitable bravery of the East Timorese, who resisted a brutal, 24-year-long military occupation, and nonviolently acted to end it, inspires us to pursue social justice here. Through the sister city relationship, we will actively support movement towards a vital, inclusive, egalitarian society in both Timor Loro Sa’e and the United States. We support grassroots democracy, sustainable development, empowerment of women and other often-marginalized groups, and the universal right to education, health care, independent labor unions and economic opportunity.*