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REPORT ON EAST TIMOR ROUND TABLE

Ottawa, February 22, 1999

I. BACKGROUND OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN EAST TIMOR

The current situation in East Timor (as described by four East Timorese guests) can be characterized as extremely volatile and fluid. According to Florentino Sarmento of the Kommer Blok, a group of young advocates of independence and those supporting integration are struggling to gain control of the East Timorese society that have developed as a result of the conflict between the East Timorese and the Indonesian government. The "revenge" killings are increasing, incidents of political assassinations are occurring, and widespread lawlessness has come to characterize everyday life. The Indonesian military is using the pre-emptive tactic of "scorched earth" operations, either in desperation or for the military gain. A "culture of violence" is now prevailing as an increase in gross human rights abuses including arbitrary arrest, detention, arbitrary execution, disappearances, torture, rape, sexual abuse, imprisonment, and the removal of citizens from their residences. Teachers, nurses, doctors, activists, and other essential personnel have already begun to leave the island since the wave of violence intensified, leading to a societal disintegration.

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Notwithstanding past and present efforts of the Canadian government, including ODA and Canadians in development and peace building projects, the East Timorese urged Canada to take immediate action to stem the growing instability and suffering in the region.

An outside intervention for a cease-fire followed by disarmament, perhaps coordinated by Canada, is perceived as absolutely necessary to prevent a looming civil war and to ensure at least limited level of security for the East-Timorese people.

The history of good relations between the Canadian and Indonesian governments bodes well for Canada to undertake such a role. The activists also expressed a desire for Canada to continue to assist the East Timorese beyond the short term horizon. Arnaldo Mira, the former Vice-rector of the University of Timor, appealed for Canadian assistance in launching a gradual process of reconstruction. The message was pointedly summed up by Manuel Abrantes of Bishop Belo's Peace and Justice Commission, the East Timorese are asking Canadians for help, hoping for a short term leadership and a long term allyship.

Ken Baskin, the Canadian Ambassador to Indonesia, also contributed to painting a picture of the troubled region. He stressed the importance of Canada as an ODA donor in East Timor. Furthermore, he contended that Indonesia is unlikely to fund reconstruction of the region and pointed out that East Timor is being increasingly perceived as a burden by the Indonesian government. He drew attention to

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