

unregulated dumping of industrial and toxic waste which has also polluted rivers, damaged coastal systems and poisoned aquifers.<sup>72</sup>

While industrial waste has become a serious problem across the Pacific, arguably the most alarming environmental issue has been the rapid loss of SEAsia's rainforests. Estimates of the amount of Indonesian rainforest deforested per annum ranges from 600,000 to 1.2 million hectares, while Indonesia now has the longest list of species threatened with extinction of any country in the world, serious soil erosion, flash-flooding, mudslides, and river systems that have serious siltation problems.<sup>73</sup> The political consequence of this for a Suharto regime already facing rebellion and resistance to its rule East Timor, Aceh and West Kalimantan, is an increasingly unstable situation in West Papua, where the multinational Freeport mining operation has come under physical attack by local communities angered at the resulting environmental destruction, and the dislocative effects that thousands of Javanese trans-migrants are having on the province.<sup>74</sup>

In responding to these destabilising forces, governing elites in Indonesia and across the region have deployed all-too-familiar tactics in order to keep a lid on simmering social tensions. This has led to a spiral of violence and instability which has seen the human rights records of, for example, Burma, Cambodia, China and Indonesia actually worsen since 1996.<sup>75</sup> It is in this context, in particular, that some serious questions need to be asked of Australia's foreign policy commitments to these ruling elites and to the convergence propositions underlying this commitment.

In Burma, for example, Australian policy-makers have steadfastly rejected calls for action against the SLORC, arguably the world's most repressive regime, in favour of an ostensibly even-handed position on trade. Beyond its explicit trade interests, Australian policy on Burma has also been driven by its broader goal of engagement with the ASEAN states who, rather than condemning the SLORC regime in Burma, are likely to welcome it as a permanent member of ASEAN. Here, of course, the convergence rhetoric is handy, as in Deputy PM Tim Fischer's reminder to Australia's critics that "*officially* Burma is headed towards democracy". (my

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid, p. 55)

<sup>73</sup>See C. Hamilton, "Third World Defoliation" in *Arena*, August-September, 1994: 10; and P. Dauvergne, "The Politics of Deforestation in Indonesia" p. 508 in *Pacific Affairs* 66 (4) 1993:497-518

<sup>74</sup> See J. McBeth, "Investment: What's Yours is Mine" in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 28:1996

<sup>75</sup> This was reported in "Repression on the Rise in Asian States" *The Australian* December 5, 1996.