



MEDIA RELEASE Austcare Supports East Timor

Austcare, the Australian international aid organisation is on the ground and actively monitoring the unrest and displacement in the Eastern districts of Vequeque and Baucau.

Austcare has committed AUD\$40 thousand to assist in the current crisis in East Timor and a needs assessment is already underway.

Increased humanitarian protection is required for displaced people, and should be coordinated through UN agencies, the Timor-Leste government officials and local networks, to ensure their safety and basic human rights, and assist in the distribution of food and other emergency items.

The UN currently describes the security situation as 'volatile' and has confirmed more than 140 homes have been torched in the eastern districts, with some local reports putting that figure much higher. A number of offices and other buildings have also been attacked. The current sporadic violence has caused many of those displaced to seek shelter elsewhere, with reports significant numbers have fled to the mountains with little or no supplies.

According to Austcare's Program Development Manager in Dili, Dr Jay Maheswaran, "The new displacements in these districts adds to the woes of the already 25,000 plus IDPs who were displaced to these districts after the 2006 crisis in Dili. Many people are still living in camps and communities awaiting a more stable situation and security assurance to return to their homes."

Austcare has been working in East Timor since 1981 and currently has several programs running, including protection and support for IDPs in Dili and their reintegration, agricultural and peacebuilding initiatives. "The resurgence of violence and displacement after the elections is distressing. We are witnessing the continuing struggle for democracy to take root in Timor-Leste, and Australians should stand by the majority of Timorese who genuinely want peace and prosperity for their country," said Austcare CEO, Major General Michael Smith AO (ret'd).

Austcare has launched a Crisis Appeal to raise further funds:

<http://www.austcare.org.au/donatenow/appeals/timor-leste-crisis-appeal.aspx>

(ENDS)

Mike Smith will be taking part in Sydney's City to Surf event and will be available to comment either in person prior to 9am or by phone on: 0439 490 297

Dr Jay Maheswaran will be available by phone in Timor-Leste on +670 726 5705

For further information contact:

**Daniel Barty
Campaign & Media Officer
(02) 9565 9104 or 0430 464 954
dbarty@austcare.org.au**