



East Timor Action Network

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The East Timor Action Network (ETAN) was formed in the United States of America after the Santa Cruz massacre of 12 November 1991. Its earliest members had a background in the peace and anti-nuclear movements. It was formed after a number of individuals held a rally for East Timor on 10 December 1991 outside Indonesia's permanent mission to the United Nations in New York. The day and location were deliberately selected – 10 December is Human Rights Day. They soon found through their networks that similar protests and expressions of concern were being made in other cities in the US. These individuals therefore joined forces, with a few of them forming the East Timor Action Network (ETAN). Charles Scheiner and John M. Miller, who were members of the War Resisters' League, obtained permission from the League to use its mailing list on a one-time only basis to inform more people about ETAN. The Canadian East Timor Alert Network provided them with a list of US residents who had previously been in contact with it. They wrote to all these people saying that they intended to focus on ending US support for the Indonesian occupation. The first financial contribution they received was from Professor Noam Chomsky of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who posted them his contribution on the same day he received their letter.

ETAN worked with US journalists Allan Nairn and Amy Goodman, who had been present at the Santa Cruz massacre. Nairn and Goodman became the public faces of the campaign in the US. ETAN's pressure point of choice was the US Congress, where they carried out an intensive program of public education and lobbying. ETAN also reached out to Portuguese-Americans, many of whom lived in the state of Rhode Island. Ronald Machtley, a Republican congressman from Rhode Island, co-sponsored a bill with long-time East Timor supporter, congressman Tony Hall of Ohio. The bill deleted all funding for a program in which the US trained the Indonesian military. While small in monetary terms, the cessation of the program (known as International Military Education and

Training – IMET), was politically significant; it was the first time the US had ever refused military assistance to Indonesia since Suharto came to power.

Two months after the passage of the bill, Bill Clinton won the US presidential elections. The new administration was compelled to work within the newly-established parameters. It therefore banned the sale of small and light arms, riot-control equipment, helicopter-mounted weaponry and armoured personnel carriers to Indonesia. In July 1993, ETAN scored another victory by stopping the sale of F-5 fighter aircraft to the Indonesian Air Force. ETAN activists were also able to get the US Congress to impose a ban on the sale of helicopter-mounted weapons to the Indonesian military. ETAN's effectiveness was acknowledged by the National Security Council's Senior Director for Asian Affairs (and Special Assistant to the President) Stanley Roth, who said that he received "more letters on East Timor in [his] job at the White House than any other country in Asia."

By 1999, ETAN had 15,000 members. As many as 25,000 people had been ETAN members over the course of the independence campaign. Its work continued even after independence, with campaigns for justice, democracy and human rights. It remains an active organisation.

Further reading:

Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste. *Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste*. Dili, 2005.

Federer, Juan. *The UN in East Timor: building Timor Leste, a fragile state*. Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2005.

Fernandes, Clinton. *The Independence of East Timor: Multidimensional Perspectives*. Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2011.