

Raymond Chan: East Timor press briefing
15:00, 2SEP99
HKONG

Thank you for joining us this afternoon.

Canada sent quite a strong delegation into East Timor. The official delegation which is from the government includes myself and other member of Parliament, called Raymonde Folco, from the Montreal area and also Ken Sunquist who is our Ambassador to Indonesia, along with seven other embassy staff and my staff. During that time, we spread into three groups, myself - I travelled all the way to Baucau which is the second largest centre of East Timor which is 120 km east of Dili.

On the following day, we travelled about 250 km around the Baucau region in South Ushu - which is a mountainous village - to observe the voting process. Another group, which is my assistant Jonathan there along with some embassy staff stayed around Dili - which is the capital city of East Timor, and they visited about 14 posts in the Dili region. The 14 poll centres. Myself in the Baucau region, I visited about 9 poll centres in that day.

Another group led by Raymonde, Raymonde Folco, visited about 6 -they went South and also travelled about 200 km south of Dili and they went to about 6 polls - a total that we covered 29 out of 200 poll centres in East Timor - about 50% of the area of East Timor. We were really overwhelmed by the determination of the East Timor people, they have travelled great distances to register their vote and at the same time, many of them elderly and the disabled have participated.

So my personal experience is that - I was awoken around 5 am by the noise made by the people. When I looked out the window, there were already people walking towards the poll stations at 5 am and by 7:30 when we reached the first poll centre, there must be about 4-5000 people lining up already, very patiently, to register their vote. In the mountainous area, when we travelled out to Oshoo which is up the mountain, I talked to some of the people that came to vote, and some of them had got up, had started walking to the poll station from midnight. So they travelled about 5-6 hours, walking to the poll station. The show-up rate, particularly in that region, was like 99%. I visited a poll centre where there were supposed to be 2400 registered voters and only 31 didn't show up. And quite a number of those that didn't show up were known to have died before the vote...for natural reasons. So the voting pattern of participation was more than 98% overall, in the whole East Timor. And to that particular reason, while the illiteracy rate was very high, more like 90% of the people doesn't know what they're doing... they were illiterate but they know what they want to do.

I talked to Bishop Basilio who is the 2nd bishop in East Timor. There's 2 bishops in East Timor - one is Bishop Beloo - everybody knows, who is the Nobel Prize winner, and the 2nd bishop which is appointed after Bishop Belo received his Nobel Peace prize - I guess he was too busy - so the Pope appointed another bishop and that is Bishop Basilio. I stayed in the convent under his jurisdiction. And I talked to Bishop Bossilio, about the response from his constituents, and he

said that many of the people asked him how to vote. The bishop said "I'm sorry, I cannot tell you how to vote, because you have to make up your decision." Then the people asked, they said "well ok, then tell us how to get rid of the military." Then the bishop said, "then I can tell you how to vote. And that is to vote for the second option, to reject the new economy package." So people know what they want. And they have exercised their right, overcoming the aversity and intimidation that they faced. And it was a very touching moment for myself. To me, it's a lifetime experience, to experience that from the people of East Timor. To me, to summarize the whole thing, I think the East Timorians have won in this process, whatever the outcome is. They have overcome aversity and intimidation to come out and tell the world what they want.

And well, there were some hairy moments in my experience. I arrived in Dili in the afternoon of the 29th. And after I settled down a little bit, my group started to drive east, to Baucau. But on our way, out of the city of Dili, before we climbed the first hill out, we encountered a group of people, East Timorians, with weapons, with homemade arrows, with hatchets. And they looked so tense. We were able to drive slowly past them, because a lot of them were scattering along the road. But we drove slowly and they gave way, so we bypassed them but it was a very scary moment, because they were looking at you, watching you, scaring you. But we walked through. But after that incident, on the way to Baucau, and in the following day, things were very orderly. We don't see any problem at all. The police were around but they were there under the demand of UNAMET, with the UN mission, there to restore order and to standby. Overall the military was not present, the military people went back, the army had gone back to the barracks. So the day, for myself, was quite peaceful. Although, overall, out of those 200 posts, as you might have read from the other reports, about 7 polls had disturbances. But after the civil police liaised with the Indonesian police, they were able to come and restore order and so some of the posts might have been suspended for a while, but eventually every one reopened again and finished the polling process.

Another scary moment was when we came back to Dili - after the first voting day, on the 30th, we spent the whole day in Baucau, and the region. And on the morning of the 31st, we drove back to Dili. It was really hairy that on the same hill, the first hill that we had to pass going out, when we were driving out of Dili - on the other side, while we were trying to climb the hill - we're about to climb the hill on the other side before we arrived into Dili, there was a roadblock on the road. It was monitored by the militias, with guns, hatchets. And then we were about 300 yards away from the roadblock, they redirected our vehicle into a field on the right. And so I told our driver to continue to drive past the barricade, and to start to come back on the road on the other side of the barricade. So I assume that they wanted to go around the barricade. But as we go back to the road and was about to pass the last militia, we were told to stop. And it was quite hairy, because we don't know who they are and they were definitely not the official military men or police. But luckily I guess, I don't know what reason, I suspect it's because they saw the Canadian logo, we have a Canadian flag on the windows, to highlight that we are Canadians. Then just before we fully stop, they waved us on again. They said...well, then my driver started to drive away. But that was a very hairy moment.

And then after we arrived in our headquarters in Dili, and then we went to the airport. I had a 12:30 flight out of Dili. Then we experienced that some of the militias were trying to stop East

Timorians leaving the country. And at the airport, it was quite chaotic - that we had to work very hard to get the seats that were reserved for ourselves, to get out of Dili.

And last night, in Dili, we still had about 6 personnel in the Canada House in Dili. But at that time there was some conflict around that region and some militias warned our staff that they were searching for somebody there and told us - our people - to stay inside the house. And there were gunshots for about an hour and a half in that region.

So I think, now, we would like to appeal, we want to appeal or throw our support for Bishop Belo's appeal for reconciliation. The government... well, I reported my experience to our Foreign Affairs Minister, Lloyd Axworthy, who is in Iceland yesterday. And we talked about the different issues and this is the position we come up with. I think we need to appeal, to support the appeal of Bishop Belo for reconciliation. I think the vote has been cast, that the people have spoken. And it is important for both sides - whatever they vote for, which political belief that they have, either pro-integration or pro-independence - it is important for both sides to start a reconciliation process, that they need to come together to rebuild East Timor, that's the important thing. And in order to create a reconciliation atmosphere - when we talk about reconciliation, we have to pledge to both sides, to respect the other's political beliefs. And also, it's important for the government of Indonesia to establish an atmosphere for reconciliation. And that includes the protection of people's rights, including mobility rights. We think it's important for the Indonesian government to continue to be responsible for the law and order situation in East Timor. People should be allowed to move around freely inside the city and in and out of East Timor. The barricades, the roadblocks should be cleared by the police. By the Indonesian authorities. Because it's only when there is freedom, when there is a level playing field, when there's no intimidation, then people can reconcile.

And also it's important for the Indonesian government, judging by the experience that we faced - of the roadblocks and arms on the streets - that the Indonesian government should clear the arms, should eliminate arms on the streets. People should not be allowed to carry their weapons onto the street, in order to create this atmosphere of reconciliation. And it is Indonesian government's responsibility to restore order and be responsible for the law and order in the streets of East Timor.

And also at the same time, our government is participating in the UN Security Council. They had a meeting yesterday. I don't have the full report yet what they talked about. But we have instructed our representative at the UN to urge the Security Council to reassess the situation to see what UN can do, to help establish that atmosphere of reconciliation. And so those are our messages from the government of Canada.

And I'll be glad to answer your questions.

[How about we finish the English and I'll do it in Cantonese...]

CP, Ray Rudowski: Is Canada prepared to send peace keepers?

A: Well, I think it's a bit premature at this time to send peace keepers...because first, before the MPR made the decision on East Timor, East Timor is still under the Indonesian sovereignty and the Indonesian government has stated again, once before, and emphasized that they would resist peacekeepers coming into East Timor. So sending a peacekeeper force into East Timor by force would not be helpful, it might make the situation worse, with the resistance of the Indonesian government. So that's one thing.

The other thing is that we feel that what have made the system work so well on the election day, is the work of the civic police, the civpols, and also the military liaisons of the UN system. When there were disturbances in the poll centres, the civpols would call in, would appeal to the Indonesian police to help. And they would come in, and settle things. And I think it's important that first, the Indonesian government, because East Timor is still under their sovereignty for one thing and also, it is their obligation, even though after the vote in MPR, that they should pick up the responsibility of law and order in the transitional period, because ...they should bear that responsibility. So in order to monitor, to make sure the Indonesian government fulfill their responsibility, I think it's important for the UN to quickly dispatch, to increase the number of civpols - they have a plan to increase the civilian police from 280 to 460, and the military liaison from 50 to 300. They should be dispatched as soon as possible, to show the UN presence. And also at the same time, to monitor the activity of the police, to make sure they fulfill their responsibility. So I think for the moment, that should be the first thing that we try. And to me, I'm not the expert, I don't know whether 460 civpols and 300 military liaison officers would be enough - but we certainly hope that UN would take it into consideration, to make sure there is enough civpols, the presence of the civpols and the presence of the military liaison officers, to make that the Indonesian government fulfills their responsibility.

Follow-up: Does Canada support the independence of East Timor?

A: We support the results of the poll. I think it's a bit premature. We have to let the process play itself out before prejudging the outcome of the poll. I don't think it's appropriate for us to prejudge at this time. But I strongly believe that, judging from the people that we encountered, there seem to be a lot...very strong pro-independence support in East Timor.

Follow-up: What would Canada do to help East Timor get back on its feet...the economy...?

A: Yes, regardless of the results, Canada has been one of the top three contributors to the development of East Timor. This year, we spent about \$4.4 million including economic development and support for UNAMET. And we're quite willing to pay our fair share, to contribute our fair share in the post-referendum, post-consultation era, to help rebuild East Timor. I think it's important that we rebuild the social structure, the education system, the governing institutions and so on. East Timor needs a lot of help in the coming days and Canada is willing to pick up our fair share of that cost.

Question: You mentioned some military movement while you were there, did you have the feeling then that violence might erupt again?

A. Not at that time, even though the atmosphere is tense but there wasn't any violence. And when they tried to stop people from boarding, from leaving East Timor and so on, there was no violence. And even at the roadblocks, they might check things out and so on, but there's no violence. At that time it was tense - and of course you can never guess what could happen - but at that time, I don't expect violence to erupt that quickly. But it is scary, for people like myself who lives in a peaceful society, to see people carrying arms on the streets, being stopped.

One other thing, we decided not to have police escort in our delegation, in our envoy. Because we feel that Canada has been friends to the East Timorians and our contribution is well recognized and we're quite neutral in the whole process. And so maybe without the police, we'll get closer to the people, such that we can understand...because sometimes with the police, we might look either pro-government or pro-Indonesia or something. So we decided to travel without escort, so when you are stopped by a barricade and people with guns and so on, that was without an escort, without any armed escort. That was a little bit hairy.

One other information I want to confirm is that our ambassador - the morning before we left Baucau, he participated in, went to a mass service with the Catholic church. He was surprised to see that most of the participants were female, and so he asked them, "what happened to all the males?" And the response is, many of them have gone back to the mountain, because they're worried about violence erupting. So I think it's so important for the future of East Timor for reconciliation, but for reconciliation to take place, there has to be law and order. Arms have to be removed from the streets, or else they would never be able to reconcile.

Q: So there was some indication that...[violence]

A: Yes, there were worries, because in East Timor there've been violence for many many years. So they know it better than we do.

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