



media, entertainment & arts alliance
the people who inform and entertain

The Hon Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
R.G. Casey Building,
John McEwen Crescent
Barton,
ACT 0221

12/03/2010

Dear Minister,

The visit to Australia this week by Indonesian President, Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, is an important opportunity to develop and strengthen ties of understanding between our two countries.

As part of this process of friendship and co-operation, the Media Alliance, which represents Australian journalists, and the International Federation of Journalists, which represents journalists in our region, respectfully requests that you raise with the President the decision by Indonesia's censorship institute, the LSF, to ban public screenings of the award-winning film *Balibo*.

The decision to ban the film has been controversial within Indonesia and is strongly opposed within the media and democratic society. As you may know, our fraternal organization, the Aliansi Jurnalis Independen is challenging the ban in the courts with the strong support of the journalist community in Indonesia and of the IFJ

It is very important for the development of relations between our two countries that the Indonesian people understand the depth of feeling in Australia surrounding the events of November 1975, including the murders of six Australian journalists by Indonesian armed forces.

The importance of this tragic episode in our recent history is highlighted by the decision of the Australian Federal Police to pursue an investigation into whether war crimes were committed during the incident.

As far as this country's community of journalists is concerned, the failure of Indonesian power-holders to acknowledge and take appropriate action for what happened at Balibo in 1975 represents an important barrier to the development of full and cordial relations between Australia and Indonesia.

The fact that the government of Dr Yudhoyono will not even allow the film to be shown to the Indonesian public suggests that this matter is far from resolved.

According to reports from Jakarta, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, has said the restriction aims to protect the country's image abroad. The Minister of Culture and Tourism, Jero Wacik, has said the film is not fit to be screened and may damage relations between Indonesia, East Timor and Australia.

Banning the film is far worse for Indonesia's image, as it suggests a less than whole-hearted commitment to freedom of speech. Further, the events of November 1975 have already damaged relations between Indonesia, East Timor and Australia.

Allowing the film to be screened publicly and offering assistance in bringing the perpetrators of the murders to justice would go a long way towards solving both of these problems.

The Media Alliance and IFJ support the AJI in its legal action against the ban and requests that Australian representatives raise the issue at the highest level during Dr Yudhoyono's official visit this week.

Yours sincerely,

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