The 3rd CDI Indonesia-Australia Parliamentary Committees Workshop

Wednesday 2nd – Thursday 3rd July 2008
Jakarta

As part of CDI’s ongoing engagement with Indonesia’s House of Representatives, the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, Republik Indonesia (DPR-RI), CDI brought together Indonesian and Australian parliamentarians actively involved in committee work in Jakarta on 2nd and 3rd July 2008. The two day Forum involved Members of the DPR’s Commission 1 (Commission on Foreign Affairs, Defense, Communication and Information) and the Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.

The aim of the Forum was to facilitate discussions between Indonesian and Australian Federal parliamentarians with an interest in the bilateral relationship on matters of common interest whilst having the opportunity to learn about parliamentary practice in our respective parliaments.

Background

This was the third in a series of forums involving Indonesian and Australian parliamentary committees convened by CDI. The first forum, with the theme of ‘Parliamentary Oversight of Treaties’, took place in July 2005 at the Hotel Mulia Senayan in Jakarta. That forum brought together Members and secretariat staff from both parliaments’ foreign affairs and treaties committees to discuss the central issues of international law and their implications for domestic politics. That forum deepened ties between the Indonesian and Australian parliaments by facilitating exchange at the highest levels.

Since the 2005 forum, CDI has held several meetings with Members of the Indonesian Parliament on areas of ongoing co-operation and assistance. CDI held a meeting with members of the Commission 1 delegation led by Dr Muhammad Hikam during their visit to Australia in June 2006. Discussions at that meeting covered a wide range of areas of possible assistance, including:

- Assistance with legislative drafting, namely current bills including those dealing with Freedom of Information and the national postal service;
- Assistance to the Commission 1 secretariat;
- Further cooperation between Commission 1 and Australia’s Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade;
- Australia /Indonesia Defence treaty and security issues; and
- Development of democratic institutions in Papua - especially the new provincial legislature
It was agreed that CDI would work closely with both Commission 1 and the relevant Australian committees to ascertain agreed areas of co-operation as part of our ongoing work to strengthen parliamentary committees in the future.

In November 2006, CDI met with the Working Group on Performance Enhancement of the House of Representatives led by Dr Eva Sundari. CDI agreed to assist the Working Group as they prepare their report on reform options and move into the implementation phase of their programme. This will involve further cooperation as part of CDI's mandate to strengthen parliamentary government in the Asia-Pacific region.

The second forum was held at Parliament House in Canberra on Friday 25th May 2007. Once again, the forum involved Members and staff of Commission 1 and the Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT) and Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJSCIS), together with senior parliamentary staff from the House of Representatives, the Senate and the Parliamentary Research Service. The theme of this forum was was ‘Understanding the role of Parliamentary Committees in policy making in Indonesia and Australia’. The aim was to facilitate discussions by Members and staff of the foreign affairs, defence and intelligence committees of the Indonesian and Australian parliaments, both on issues of policy substance and on issues related to the effective functioning of parliamentary committees in general.

The Indonesian delegation and the Australian participants expressed great enthusiasm for the workshop and the theme chosen. It was unanimously agreed that CDI should continue to facilitate this type of gathering of Australian and Indonesian MPs and the workshop become a permanent fixture in the CDI calendar.

Accordingly, in March 2008, CDI Deputy Director, Mr Quinton Clements met with the Chairman of Commission 1, Mr Theo L. Sambuaga, and other Members to discuss the next Indonesia-Australia Parliamentary Committees Forum. They proposed that the next forum be held at the Parliament complex in Jakarta and be hosted by Commission 1 and that the Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade be invited to participate. CDI agreed to organize and convene the Forum and fund the participation of the Australian Committee.

**Forum Participants**

The Indonesian participants were led by the Chairman of Commission 1, Mr Theo L. Sambuaga and included Mr Abdillah Toha, Chairman of the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Relations (BKSAP), and Mr Sidarto Danusubroto, Vice-Chairman of Commission 1. The Australian parliamentarians attending the Forum were:

- Senator Michael Forshaw (Australian Labor Party, NSW) Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade;
- The Hon David Hawker MP (Liberal Party, Member for Wannon) Deputy Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade;
• Mr Michael Danby MP (Australian Labor Party, Member for Melbourne Ports) Chair, Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee - Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
• The Hon Arch Bevis MP (Australian Labor Party, Member for Brisbane) Chair, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, and Chair, Defence Sub-Committee - Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade;
• The Hon. Bob Baldwin MP (Liberal Party, Member for Paterson), Deputy Chair, Defence Sub-Committee - Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade;
• The Hon Andrew Robb MP (Liberal Party, Member for Goldstein) Member, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade;
• Dr John Carter, Secretary, Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.

CDI Director, Professor Ben Reilly and Mr Clements also participated.

One Australian parliamentarian, Mr Michael Danby MP, has now participated in all three forums. On the Indonesian side, Mr Danusubroto and Mr Toha have also participated in all three forums.

The Forum
The theme of the Forum was ‘Parliament and its role in promoting regional cooperation’. The aim was to facilitate discussions by Members and staff of the foreign affairs committees of the Indonesian and Australian parliaments, both on issues of policy substance and on issues related to the effective functioning of parliamentary committees in general.

The Forum was opened by the Deputy Speaker of the DPR-RI, His Excellency Mr Muhaimin Iskandar. This was followed by opening remarks from Mr Sambuaga and Senator Forshaw. Senator Forshaw observed that in May 2004, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade tabled a report on its inquiry into Australia’s relationship with Indonesia. In the report, Near Neighbours—Good Neighbours, an Inquiry into Australia’s Relationship with Indonesia, the Committee recommended to the Australian Government that there be an ongoing dialogue between the Australian Committee and Commission One. Quoting from the report, Senator Forshaw stated that:

Australia’s relationship with its new neighbour, Indonesia, is an extremely important bilateral relationship. It is in the interests of both nations for the relationship to be strong in all its dimensions—strategic, political, economic, and cultural. …

Australia and Indonesia are near neighbours. Being good neighbours is an art requiring a delicate balancing of distance and closeness: the distance that is respectful of difference and sovereignty—a closeness that guarantees a helping hand in times of need.
The sessions on the first day focused on a series of short presentations on the democratisation process in Indonesia and the Indonesia-Australia relationship followed by questions and comments from the floor and general discussion. Mr Abdillah Toha provided an excellent overview of the current Indonesian political scene and the lead-up to next year’s parliamentary and presidential elections. He described the constitutional amendments since 1999 that have altered the political system, the structure of the House of Representatives and the Indonesian Parliament’s second chamber, the House of Regional Representatives, and the new parliamentary electoral law passed in 2008. Mr Toha noted that so far there were 35 newly registered political parties together with the existing 16 parties contesting the 2009 parliamentary elections. As for presidential aspirants in 2009, Mr Toha observed that there were no new faces among the contenders and with the declining popularity of the incumbents, there was a need to introduce alternative candidates. In his opinion, the main issues that will dominate the parliamentary and presidential elections are the economy, energy and food policies, nationalism and religion, and corruption. The subsequent presentations covered the decentralisation process, the implementation of the Lombok Treaty; the challenges of border security; and the issue of migrant workers. These presentations led to a free-ranging exchange amongst the participants. The discussion touched on a variety of issues, including non-traditional security problems and potentially sensitive issues in the bilateral relationship.

The second day focused on the role played by the respective committees in the policy making process. The keynote address was delivered Dr Rizal Sukma, Deputy Executive Director, Centre for Strategic & International Studies. Dr Sukma spoke on the subject of political change in Indonesia, its impacts on foreign policy and the role of parliamentary diplomacy. He began by describing Indonesia’s democracy as “still characterised by a combination of dramatic breakthroughs, moments of great optimism, and occasional frustration as well”. He pointed out that the “move to democracy and the revival of Islam” are the two significant developments of the post-reformasi era. Dr Sukma argued that Indonesia’s democracy is resilient and that Islam is playing a crucial and positive role in the development of this democracy. In commenting on the role of Indonesia’s Parliament in foreign policy making, Dr Sukma noted that Parliament has shown its “willingness and ability” to play a major role but is constrained by a number of factors. These include an Executive reluctant to allow Parliament to play a more active role, poor access to information and limited capacity on the part of parliamentarians to engage more fully in the policy making process. Dr Sukma concluded by advocating a greater role for Parliament through parliamentary diplomacy – that is, “international activities undertaken by parliamentarians in order to increase mutual understanding between countries, to assist each other in improving control of governments and the representation of a people and to increase the democratic legitimacy of inter-governmental institutions”.

The next sessions shifted the focus from these broad issues to ways to more effectively use parliamentary committees as a mechanism of legislative and policy development. Discussion centred on the practical work of committees in our respective parliaments – how do Commissions in the DPR operate, what is their role, what are the issues they are faced with; and how do the Australian committees operate. Mr Tosari Widjaja spoke on the role and work of Commission 1. He described the powers and functions of the Commission, noting that Commissions are key bodies in the DPR because it is in the

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Commissions that draft legislation is considered and amended and that Ministers and officials interact with the Parliament. Commissions have a crucial role in law-making and thereby can influence government policy and actions. Following this, Mrs Nining Indra Shaleh, Secretary-General of the DPR-RI, provided an overview of the House of Representatives as a way of placing the discussion on the role of Commission 1 with the broader context of the Parliament.

The Hon. David Hawker MP then spoke on the role and work of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. He outlined the composition of the Committee and the fundamental principles underlying the role of parliamentary committees in the Australian context. Mr Hawker described the various activities of the Committee, the type of issues considered for public inquiry and the value of such inquiries. This was followed by discussion on the way committee inquiries, such as those undertaken by Australian committees, feed into the policy making process and contribute to public awareness and debate of national issues. Such an examination proved useful for the Indonesian parliamentarians for consideration as a new avenue to have input into the policy making process. For the Australian parliamentarians, it was beneficial to learn how different the DPR and its commissions are to the Australian Parliament and therefore to gain a better understanding of the Indonesian parliamentary process.

The final session focused on the ways that the Indonesian and Australian parliaments and their respective committees can build on the work of CDI in convening the current and previous Forums to create an ongoing relationship.

During the course of the Forum, a separate meeting was held involving Dr John Carter and Indonesian parliamentary officials, primarily from the secretariats of Commission 1 and the Committee for Inter-parliamentary Cooperation. Dr Carter discussed the role, structure and operations of Committee Secretariats in the Australian Parliament and the process of providing advice and guidance to new Committee Chairs and Members. The latter was of particular interest to his Indonesian counterparts given that there will be a new Parliament elected in 2009.

**Future Initiatives**

The Indonesian and Australian participants expressed great enthusiasm for the Forum and the theme chosen. Feedback from the participants has been overwhelmingly positive. It was unanimously agreed that this type of gathering of Australian and Indonesian MPs become an annual event. This would help to broaden and deepen the dialogue between the two parliaments and countries. Participants made a number of suggestions to develop this proposal including:

- That Australian parliamentary study leave scheme should be changed to focus on Australia’s immediate region, including Indonesia;
- That the Australia-Indonesia Institute should play a role in facilitating this event;
- That the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Association should be extended to include Australia; and
- That there should regular exchanges between other Australian and Indonesian parliamentary committees.

Participants also noted that CDI is best placed to convene these events and has successful track record of doing so. Although noting CDI’s budget constraints and its other parliamentary strengthening priorities, Forum participants on both sides requested
that CDI continue to facilitate these meetings involving the two foreign affairs committees.

Conclusion

Administratively there were few problems. The visit to Jakarta of the Joint Standing Committee delegation and the Forum was well supported by the DPR-RI Secretariat-General and by the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. CDI worked closely with the Australian Parliament’s Department of the House of Representatives, in particular with the Committee Office and the Parliamentary Relations Office, in planning and preparing the delegation’s itinerary and the Forum. The Australian Embassy assisted in arranging meetings for the delegation with a range of Indonesian leaders. The Indonesian Embassy in Canberra also provided invaluable assistance to CDI in organizing the visit.

In Jakarta, CDI enjoyed the full support and cooperation of the Speaker of the DPR-RI, His Excellency Mr H. R. Agung Laksono, the Chairs and Members of Commission 1 and the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation and the staff of the Secretariat-General.

The Forum program worked well, resulting in a useful mix of presentation and participation. The Australian delegation commented on the great degree of preparation for the Forum by the Indonesian side. This was reflected in the high quality of the presentations the Indonesian Members gave. Participants also noted that the fact that CDI identified specific issues for discussion and provided a framework in which these discussions took place was one reason why the Forum worked so well. Mr Sambuaga suggested that future Forums focus on one specific topic such as bilateral economic cooperation. The use of simultaneous translation for the Forum proved to be extremely useful in generating ease of discussion and enhanced understanding.

The Australian delegation used the opportunity of visiting Jakarta to further their links with parliamentarians and other prominent Indonesians, as well as interacting with the Australian diplomatic and expatriate communities. All participants, both Australian and Indonesian, exhibited a genuine desire to learn about their respective parliamentary systems and gain a better understanding of the issues affecting the bilateral relationship. One Australian participant commented that despite visiting Indonesia regularly over 20 years, he had learnt a great deal from the Forum.

Like all of CDI’s activities, the Forum provides the basis for the continued strengthening of links between regional counterpart democratic institutions, and between individual parliamentarians. As is always the case at successful meetings, an important benefit of this gathering of Indonesian and Australian parliamentarians was the informal exchange and fostering of relationships that occurred between and after the formal sessions and at the social events. Participants got to know each other and to exchange ideas and experiences as individuals involved in public life. The contacts, and often the firm friendships, that can be established on such occasions are something to be valued highly in the building of a close relationship between our respective parliaments and countries.

Having now convened the Forum successfully on three occasions, CDI has developed very strong links with Commission 1, the Committee for Inter-parliamentary Cooperation and the DPR-RI generally which will greatly assist in future CDI Indonesia focused activities.
Acknowledgements

The visit of the Joint Standing Committee delegation to Jakarta and the Forum would not have been successful without the active involvement and support of the Indonesian House of Representatives, the Australian Parliament, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra.

CDI extends its deepest appreciation to the Speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives, His Excellency Mr H. R. Agung Laksono, the Chairman of Commission 1, Mr Theo L. Sambuaga, the Chairman of the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Relations, Mr Abdillah Toha, and the Secretary-General of the DPR-RI, Mrs Nining Indra Shaleh, for their wonderful support. CDI especially wishes to thank the secretariat staff of the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Relations and Commission 1 for their generous assistance, advice and excellent preparations. CDI is especially grateful to Mr Bill Farmer, Australian Ambassador to Indonesia and his staff, in particular Dr Justin Lee and Mr Michael Kachel, for their assistance in organising the delegation’s visit.