

# MAPPING COMMEMORATIVE CULTURES, BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

## **CASE STUDY: Timor Leste**

**AUTHOR: ASOSIASAUN CHEGA! BA ITA**

### **1. Background on the Period of Violence**

**Killing the hope of an independent Timor-Leste.**

After 450 years of Portuguese colonization and Japanese military invasion during World War II, Timor-Leste gained just 11 days of independence under Fretilin Party President Nicolau Lobato before Indonesia invaded on December 7, 1975. Under the pretexts of anti-colonialism and anti-communism, and supposedly in response to the emerging conflict between political parties inside Timor-Leste, Indonesia launched the invasion and subsequent occupation named Operation Lotus. During the first five years of Indonesian occupation, Indonesian forces repeatedly committed public massacres, particularly in the capital of Dili. Timorese people experienced direct and indirect effects of conflict as Indonesia gained geographical and administrative control over the entire territory, and the death toll continued to rise. Many civilians and Timorese resistance fighters of FALINTIL, the armed branch of Fretilin, lost their lives in conflict or chose to surrender to Indonesian forces. There was a perception that Timor-Leste did not have equal capacity to fight Indonesian forces, whose military power and resources were comparatively well-developed.

Many have cited the collapse of Base de Apoio (the Resistance Base) in 1978 when FALINTIL was bombed inside the caves of Mount Matebian, as the last hope lost for the fight against Indonesia. Three years into the occupation, many Timorese had been displaced from their lands and homes by fear or force; the death toll from famine – hunger and related illness – between 1975 and 1978 was over 31,520 people. These numbers signify the brutality of indirect Indonesian occupation strategies in a short time period and set the scene for the occupier's behavior in later years.

## 2. Background on the Significant Date or Event Being Commemorated

Conflict and famine had weakened civilian and FALINTIL resistance; then on the last day of 1978, Nicolau Lobato was ambushed and killed. Indonesia assumed this new vacuum of resistance leadership indicated their victory, which was what they needed to start developing the territory's economy and open its door to international aid. However, Timorese resistance fighters and civilians were silently organizing among themselves.

### EVENT 1: MARABIA TRAGEDY, STARTING ON 10 JUNE 1980

On June 10, 1980, organized clandestine fighters executed a surprise attack against Indonesian military posts in the central north hills surrounding Dili (Marabia, Becora, Dare and Fatunaba). At the site of Marabia, several Indonesian soldiers were killed. In the aftermath of the June 10 attacks, hundreds of people were arrested, tortured, killed and disappeared in a massive revenge operation that involved the entire Indonesian security apparatus in Dili, with the detention of some people lasting for many years.

This tragedy is known as "the reincarnation" for Timorese resistance fighters, conveying a message to the world that Timor was still active in their fight to gain independence. The Vice-President of the Marabia Committee, Lourenço da Conceição, further stressed, *"The attacks of June 10, 1980 were to inspire all former combatants and FALINTIL in the jungle that we can continue to pursue a process towards independence because the Indonesian military only captured our bodies, but our spirit and the principles of the struggle continued to achieve our goals of freedom."*

According to the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste (CAVR) 121 people were killed, disappeared, or died in detention from torture weeks after June 10, 1980. Detainees were sent to the island of Atauro, North of Dili; some never returned home. Most of the victims were killed in Dili and some in the districts of Aileu, Manufahi, and Manatuto. They were captured trying to flee Indonesian forces' response to the Marabia attack, or on suspicion of being members of clandestine networks that had played a role in their planning. The consequences of Marabia – Indonesian forces' "sweep" of Dili – severely affected the wider population.

### EVENT 2: SUAI CHURCH MASSACRE, 6 SEPTEMBER 1999

In the 1990s Timor's struggle for independence started gaining international attention, and pressure on Indonesia grew. In 1998, President Suharto resigned after 32 years in power. In January 1999, the new President of Indonesia B.J. Habibie asked the United Nations Secretary-General for a referendum on Timor-Leste's self-determination. The Secretary-General accepted the request, began consultation with Portugal and Indonesia, and then entered

### THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR JUSTICE, TRUTH, AND RECONCILIATION

In 2014, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) launched the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth & Reconciliation (GIJTR), a consortium of nine international organizations focused on offering holistic, integrative, and multidisciplinary approaches to issues of truth, justice, and reconciliation. GIJTR works primarily with local populations, civil society organizations, survivors, and governments to develop transitional justice approaches that are victim-centered and collaborative and support dignity, respect, inclusion, and transparency in societies emerging from conflict or periods of authoritarian rule. Since its founding, GIJTR has engaged with people from 72 countries, worked with 681 civil society organizations, conducted 323 community-driven projects, and documented more than 5,040 human rights violations.

For more information, please visit [gijtr.org](http://gijtr.org).



**GIJTR**

Global Initiative for Justice  
Truth & Reconciliation

into an agreement with the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission in April of that year to stop any acts of violence in the territory. On May 5, both Portugal and Indonesia were authorized by the Secretary-General to conduct the widespread referendum (popular consultation), and the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was established. News spread throughout the Timorese population about ongoing significant changes in the territory, and in response, the Indonesian military formed several militia groups to frighten the Timorese people to vote for special autonomy – and therefore integration – into Indonesia. One prominent militia group, the Laksaur, was established in the Indonesian integrationist stronghold of Covalima municipality (popularly known as Suai). According to survivors in Salele – 30 minutes from Suai town and close to the Indonesian border – torture and forced disappearances of civilians started around January 1999, with a major torture incident in April of more than 9 people. Timorese civilians feared for their safety because of the growing violence from Laksaur and intimidation from the Indonesian forces leading up to the popular consultation on August 30, 1999. Thousands of civilians in Suai had fled to West Timor, and thousands more had sought safety at the Nossa Senhora de Fatima Church compound, widely known as the Suai Church. On Saturday, September 4, 1999, the referendum results were announced – that Timor-Leste had rejected special autonomy, confirming a widespread desire for independence from Indonesia. Laksaur and Indonesian forces immediately began burning homes and buildings, and on September 6 militiamen backed by Indonesian forces drove up to the Suai Church compound and opened fire, throwing grenades and attacking everyone seeking safety with machetes. The Church was torched with people inside, and the brutal massacre continued, including in surrounding school buildings.

Between 27 and 200 people were killed during the attack and another 30 in targeted killings that followed. Among those killed were three priests, other clergy, women, men, and children. Eyewitness accounts testified that women were separated from men, and the men were killed while many women, some reporting up to thousands, were taken by militia and Indonesian forces in the wake of the popular consultation results. According to senior Timorese activist Jose Luis Oliveria, many of those taken experienced sexual violence and slavery. Some young women taken back to West Timor have paraded around as “war trophies” – including 15-year-old Juliana “Alola” dos Santos who was seized, raped, and forced to marry the Laksaur militia sub-group commander Edigio Manek. The bodies of those killed in the massacre were also moved around and discarded by militia and military; some have yet to be found.

## **2.1 Gaps or Points of Contention Between Official Narratives and the Narratives of Victim and Survivor Groups**

**Stark differences exist regarding official numbers of victims recognized in the CAVR and those cited in memorials by the Government and the Centro Nacional *Chega!* (National Center for *Chega!* aka CNC), with those of survivor groups and CSOs.**

### **EVENT 1**

While CAVR’s official records revealed the names of 121 people killed, disappeared or who had died in detention either as a result of torture or severe deprivation following the Marabia tragedy, civil society organizations (CSOs) estimate those affected reached 5,000 victims. As of 2010, 83 bodies of those missing were still not found.

## EVENT 2

In Suai, the official death toll of what became known as Dark September remains unknown. Records from international and Indonesian assessments from human rights bodies confirm between 40-50 were killed, while the NGO Yayasan HAK and other CSOs place the figure between 50 and 200. Survivors recall hundreds of dead or injured bodies from the attack on September 6, 1999, and many more that were taken and dumped down the road, which is now the site of the official Monument for September 6. Approximately 27 bodies were recovered from mass graves in West Timor in November 1999 under the direction of the Commission on Inquiry into Human Rights Violations (KPP-HAM). It is not known how many people were taken in total.

### **3. How is the Significant Date or Event Commemorated in the Public Sphere by Officials? What are the Positive or Negative Examples of Official Commemorative Practices and Their Intended Functions?**

Following independence, Timor-Leste's government has made multiple attempts to commemorate atrocities committed during the occupation. However, efforts are largely limited to constructing symbolic monuments and activities. Maintaining a good relationship with the neighboring Indonesian government takes clear priority over more controversial reparations for wartime victims. Consequently, many of these victims and their families are marginalized and silenced. Among the limited government resources available for commemorating past atrocities, more recent and "relevant" events (including Dark September) are given priority over older episodes like the Marabia Massacre. The government's commitment to existing reparation efforts is also questionable.

#### **NON-INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT POLICY**

Government support is largely visible in the construction of physical monumental sites and the preservation of archives. In December 2005, the government established the Archives & Museum of East Timorese Resistance (the Resistance Museum) which displays a range of eyewitness statements, evidential records, and artifacts related to Timor-Leste's resistance and independence struggles. While museums are important for remembrance and civic education, attending to victims' needs – including bringing justice to those affected through prosecution of perpetrators, initiating search programs for those who disappeared etc – should be of equal priority according to survivors and CSOs.

The government's exclusivity is clear in many contexts. In the years after 1999, some attempts by Indonesia to find perpetrators of human rights violations to face prosecution failed to yield results as perpetrators somehow remained "not found". In 2004 the Indonesia-Timor-Leste Truth and Friendship Commission (TFC) was established during a Senior Official Meeting between Indonesian and Timor-Leste leaders in Bali. In 2009, CSOs and victims' families were again disappointed by narrow political goals when President Jose Ramos Horta announced that there would be no international tribunal, years after they had expressed concern over the results of the Bali meeting. This came at the same time the Commander of the Laksaur militia

Suai, Maternus Bere, was indicted on a Crime against Humanity but was released without any explanation. These events confirmed that strengthening friendship with the Indonesian government took precedence over ongoing issues of disappeared people and separated children, and the impunity of Indonesian perpetrators of human rights violations during the occupation. In the case of some Laksaur militia leaders whose whereabouts remain well known, including the militia leader who took Alola dos Santos, attempts to hold them to account have mostly come from survivors and CSOs on the Timor-Leste side of the border.

## **MARABIA**

During the 34th commemoration of the Marabia tragedy, some victims' families held images of their loved ones, scattered flowers, and lit candles. Some more vulnerable families of victims who remain missing are rarely given a platform to voice their grievances and demands. At this commemoration, the Marabia Committee members and some government officials spoke, all of whom were men. Some victim families do not participate in such commemorations, as their missing family members' status remains uncertain, and there is little to no official efforts in renewed search efforts for victims.

Quoting Lucilia da S. Alves, who was captured, tortured, and exiled to Atauro island for three years for her and her family's involvement in clandestine activities, *"My father and brother died for this nation's independence, but now that we have independence, no one remembers their sacrifice or mine."* Lucilia only receives an old age pension, with no other forms of reparations or recognition for what her family endured. Lucilia's situation is quite common among other survivors and victim families, and many share her resentment and frustration.

Some political figures whose families were affected by the Marabia tragedy are more likely to be closely involved in commemorative and documentation activities, like Social Party Leader Avelino Coelho da Silva, who attended the 34th Marabia Commemoration, and who serves as the vice secretary-general of the *Comité Orientador 25* (Steering Committee 25). This Committee conducts research on student heroes' contributions and struggles during the Marabia tragedy. Reparations and commemorating wartime tragedies remain low on many government officials' lists.

In the 2015 trade fair organized by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Environment, government ministers further reiterated the official standpoint that trade and friendship with Indonesia take priority over massacre victims' needs or demands. Even during recent historical site visits including one to the Marabia monument, there was no attempt to engage with survivors or victims' families.

## **TIME LAG IN MARABIA COMMEMORATION ACTIVITY**

While being a turning point for resistance during the conflict, a significant amount of time had passed before official commemoration events took place for Marabia, which occurred 21 years prior to the restoration of independence. For years, government officials of Timor-Leste overlooked the Marabia tragedy's victim-survivors stories and their needs. Official attention was mainly directed to human rights violations that happened in the wake of popular consultations. Possible reasons for the delay include (i) Officials with power may lack direct involvement in the Marabia tragedy due to their age or location in comparison to more recent events (i.e. Dark September), and (ii) a desire to forget the trauma and loss. Only in 2015, 35 years after

the Marabia tragedy, did then President Taur Matan Ruak publicly express condolences for the tragedy on STLNews: *"... those who died are our heroes for generations, and will not be forgotten. Timor only gained independence once. We become heroes by contributing what we can in this era of independence"*. This was the same year that Matan Ruak initiated the construction of a monument honoring the officially identified 120 identified martyrs.

Since the establishment of Centro Nacional Chega, the institution has been taking a role to initiate the commemoration of Marabia Massacre.

## **SUAI**

In contrast, memorial services honoring victims from Dark September were held under the leadership of Nobel Laureate Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, a year after the massacre took place. With the support of the British embassy and the Catholic Church, families of victims and survivors were able to establish a small monument for those who died at the site, which was visited by UN Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson in 2002. In 2003, President Kayrala Xanana Gusmao inaugurated a traditional house dedicated to honoring Dark September victims. In 2009, three plaques were built in memory of the three priests who died during the attack, and with government support, a new church was constructed in Suai in 2010, called the Ave Maria Church. However, there is no detail related to Dark September on the grounds of this church, where three concrete statues of the priests stand at the entrance. The government, including CNC, established the Dark September 1999 Monument and Museum situated a few hundred meters up the road from the Ave Maria Church. The Dark September Monument is the site where survivors claim that bodies were taken to be disposed of. The monument is gated with no indication of public access.

On the contrary, the case of the Suai Massacre was brought to the Adhoc human rights tribunal in Jakarta in 2003. After conducting the inquiry into the case, the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission concluded the allegation of the crimes against humanity conducted in this case. However, the human rights court declared no crimes against humanity in this case and acquitted all the defendants.

## **LIMITED COMMITMENTS**

The government-mandated institution, the Centro Nacional Chega! (CNC), was set up in 2017 as a successor institution to the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation (CAVR). Based in the former Camarca (Balide) prison, a former torture site, CNC's key mission is to preserve collective memory and promote solidarity for victims who suffered human rights abuses between 1974-1999. On top of funding remembrance, documentation, and commemoration activities, CNC funds some CSO activities. These include activities involving extensive survivor networks that document survivors' narratives and bring them into civic education through survivor-centered historical records and introducing historically inclusive civic education curricula. A number of CSOs, including Asia Justice and Rights and sister organizations Association Chega! for Us (ACbit), have worked closely with CNC to collaborate and lobby for participatory activities with survivors. The CNC also organizes large-scale commemorations, but the output has mostly been physical sites like monuments and plaques. The CNC's commitment to participatory collaboration with survivors with lesser-known stories is sometimes questioned. Recently, CNC has shown commitment to recognizing more women survivors' stories, including those who survived Marabia and Dark September.

#### **4. How Is The Significant Date or Event Commemorated in the Local Sphere By Victim and Survivor Communities/ Victim- or Survivor-centered Associations/Civil Society Organizations?**

Since the state's main focus has been on building physical symbols, CSOs and survivor groups have connected commemorations to tangible transitional justice measures for survivors, especially marginalized communities including victims of sexual violence, children born of war, and stolen children. Officially, these groups of people are not regarded as heroes the same way armed clandestine figures are.

The Marabia Committee, for instance, was founded by survivors, victims' families, and human rights activists to honour and remember the named and unnamed victims of events spared by Marabia, following the restoration of Timor's independence in May 2002. This core group spent years advocating for government recognition and public memorialization, while organizing their own commemorations every June 10. Similarly, on September 6, 2001, two years after the Suai massacre, CSOs, families, and communities in Suai organized a simple commemoration at the site of the Suai Church. Celebrations are now organized annually with increasing public involvement including many civil society groups working on human rights.

In the early years of independence, commemorations allowed organizations to identify living survivors and victims' families, and connect them with growing community support networks. Now, survivors are starting to take matters into their own hands once again. In Suai, Alola dos Santos, her family, and a local woman victims protection police officer who is also a survivor of Dark September, came together with priests and representatives from surrounding communities in the hopes to form their own commission to remember and recognize victims of Dark September.

#### **5. How is the Significant Date or Event Commemorated in Your Organization?**

##### **COLLABORATING ON COMMEMORATION: CIVIL SOCIETY, SURVIVOR NETWORKS AND VICTIMS' FAMILIES COMMEMORATIONS**

Contrary to Government and officials' engagement with commemoration dates and sites, CSOs including AJAR and sister ACbit, as well as the National Victims Association (NVA) were part of the lobbying and advocacy for official recognition of Marabia victims since the early 2000s. The importance of victims' and survivors' stories is recognized by ACbit and AJAR as one of the keys to broader transitional justice goals – truth-telling, prosecution, reparations, and reform and non-recurrence. For two decades ACbit and AJAR have provided assistance and sought recognition for survivors' stories and suffering with the intention of seeking justice and educating young people.

In 2015, ACbit commemorated the experiences of victims and survivors at torture sites in Dili, including many connected to the Marabia tragedy. With support from ACbit, 15 former political prisoners led the site visit and spoke of their own experiences to high school and university students and representatives from various government bodies. One of the torture survivors stated clearly that the purpose of the site visit was to educate young people on what their families went through, to prevent the recurrence of their experience. The high school students

were unaware of these stories from Marabia and the torture sites prior to the visit. Again in 2018, with the intention to link current issues of gender-based violence (GBV) with the violence of the past, ACbit ran another historical tour led by survivors of the Suai massacre.

AJAR seeks to collaborate with survivors in empowering ways and to invite the broader community – especially youth – to learn and participate in creative documentation and exhibitions. In June 2019, AJAR and ACbit organized an open-air exhibition to commemorate the lives lost and those who disappeared after Marabia. One woman who was 15 years old at the time, Terezhina de Jesus, was arrested and sent to Atauro Island with her family where they were detained for four miserable years. During the exhibition, her story was told. Terezhina stated, *“There is still no justice for my family, or for myself. No one from the government has ever come and asked us anything. This is the first time I have told my story. I really want the government to pay attention to me, my family and to all the other victims.”*

Young people from AJAR’s Human Rights and Social Activist School (HR School) have become connected to survivors of Marabia, Dark September and other human rights violations by attending commemoration events and providing mutual aid and assistance through AJAR activities. The HR School is a civic education method that fills the gap found in the national education system. The School engages with students from all 13 municipalities in basic, intermediate, and advanced classes, and places international human rights mechanisms and knowledge in a Timorese context. Through lectures, assessments, and fieldwork, this generational bridge mutually benefits both youth and survivors in the struggle for justice of human rights violations.

To commemorate the International Day of the Right to Truth and Dignity of Victims of Gross Human Rights Violations in March 2020, the Marabia exhibition was opened at the University of Peace in Dili with a particular focus on women’s stories. In June of the same year, the Marabia Memorial became a permanent online exhibition on AJAR’s website for all to access, especially since physical commemoration was constrained by COVID-19 restrictions in Timor-Leste.

Through current projects, AJAR seeks to connect past conflict and current violence even more clearly through workshops and training as part of a recent project on learning for transformation to end GBV. The program’s 23 “Learning Consortium” member organizations have steadily built an understanding on the links between historical and current GBV, and further the commemorative work by identifying survivors of human rights violations in their districts.

## **6. Lessons Learned on Commemorations in Timor-Leste**

### **Advocacy Breeds Interest and Engagement.**

Some themes found in the process of organization and execution of commemorations of both events are:

#### **NON-INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT ACTION**

Participation in commemoration activities is deeply personal, and institutions rely on proximity or relevance of the event to determine their participation or support. Participation of victim-survivors and their families can be mired by a lack of action by Government bodies to retrieve their loved ones, seek justice through prosecution or victim-survivors full participation in the



organization (formally through committee/commissions or informally). In addition, government institutions like the CNC do not prioritize commemorative or justice-seeking action unless someone or certain individuals at the institution has relational proximity to the event, or in response to persistent lobbying by CSOs and survivor groups.

### **A KEY CONTRIBUTION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

The Catholic Church has played a fundamental role in attempts to protect Timorese from violence and death, with some churches being the only sites of the accepted congregation under Indonesian occupation. As such, Catholic traditions including mass, prayers, and lighting of candles feature strongly in commemorations to honor victims and the role that the Church played in the struggle for independence.

### **SELF-ADVOCACY THROUGH COMMEMORATION**

Survivors and victims' families who have been denied justice through prosecutions or a commitment of non-recurrence by the perpetrators or the State, have conducted self-advocacy through fighting for recognition, organizing with other survivors or local CSOs and the Church, and in local commemorations. Survivors are not passive or lack agency, but have been positioned as such through erasure or patriarchal heroism in commemorative practices. Survivors and victims' families are the drivers of movements for commemoration, and they have proved to be their own best advocates given the right collective support.

### **RECOGNIZING UNOFFICIAL NARRATIVES**

Civic education built from broad perspectives beyond that of mostly male armed resistance fighters is scarce. However, following many years of lobbying and working together, and through the success of AJAR's HR School, CNC has recognized the need to build on survivors' perspectives and unofficial narratives. Recently, CNC has become more receptive to the stories of women survivors of sexual violence, who have previously been erased or ignored in collective activities of commemoration/remembrance. The voices of other groups, including LGBTIQ+ or disabled people's experiences during the occupation, have yet to be considered in the public and official narrative.

### **VICTIM-SURVIVORS' PARTICIPATION**

CSOs are driven by both a mission for justice through the rule of law and survivors' groups' needs in their work to recognize, implement and advocate for wider (public/official) commemoration. Recognition is necessary in advocacy, to support the legitimacy of survivors' stories through public dialogue and spaces. Similar to the Marabia exhibition, unofficial commemorations with survivors' groups often mean survivors/those with lived experience have greater participation in the commemoration process or have more say in the format and execution – therefore gaining ownership over their narrative. An example of participation is in Rotuto, Manufahi municipality, where CSOs, survivors, and youth organized a quiz and games night to commemorate their experiences. The quiz was developed from survivors' recollections of experiences and centered on their narrative, successfully providing knowledge and entertainment, besides actively engaging young people in the commemoration.

## **CIVIC EDUCATION IS CRUCIAL TO COLLECTIVE REMEMBRANCE**

Since traditional conflict documentation often focuses on key “battlefield” events, naturally the State narrative centers around armed resistance fighters, often male, and their experiences and struggles. Post-conflict, they become the only group that the State commemorates as martyrs and heroes, thus eligible for State benefits in the form of the veterans’ pension. In contrast, groups fighting the “silent battle” on the home fronts, including women, widows, single mothers, and children born of war, are often marginalized, hence the severity of their sacrifices is rarely recognized. These groups endure poor post-conflict systems and existing systems of patriarchy and favor towards armed resistance fighters. Thus they are often more socially and economically vulnerable than their male counterparts. The CNC and CSOs work with survivors’ stories in the hope to strengthen young Timorese people’s knowledge of the past to prevent future recurrences and situate these perspectives in the national curriculum. The CNC and CSOs also build strong engagement in the groups to improve survivors’ socio-economic livelihood.

## **7. Identify Best Practices That Work to Instill an Inclusive Memory Culture and Broader Goals of Reconciliation, Recognition, Truth-Seeking, Education for Future Generations, and Non-Repetition.**

The best key practices of establishing commemorative cultures in Timor-Leste are:

### **PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES**

Full engagement and participation of survivors and victims’ families in the events which are commemorated by CSOs and state religious organizations form the foundation for a commemorative culture based on truth-telling. Without survivors having a platform or space to tell their truths, commemoration practices would be void of reason.

### **INCLUSIVE CIVIC EDUCATION**

Including the experiences and testimonies of survivors and victims’ families in civic education not only offers a fuller history, but shows recognition and appreciation for the sacrifices that are not publicly lauded or spoken of. Many women’s stories of the occupation relate closely to families’ survival and the ability of young people to enjoy their freedoms today. It is vital that survivors have ownership over their stories, and in showing their contribution to the struggle for independence it is possible to situate an entire gender into a heroic role that has traditionally been erased. As well as truth-telling, public recognition and platforming stories within civic education do a greater service to breaking down harmful stereotypes of women lacking agency or being passive in conflict.

### **HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO COMMEMORATION**

If recognition and ownership over how survivors tell their stories is the root of a healthy future free from recurrence, then addressing the needs of survivors based on their experiences is the soil to nourish those roots. Survivors and victims’ families have a higher chance

of facing stigma, discrimination, material poverty, and distress because of their trauma. Commemorations participated by survivors often involve dialogue on material, social, and or economic needs for them and their communities that are still living the legacy of conflicts. Continued post-conflict experiences include social stigma for engaging in relationships with Indonesian soldiers; mental and physical disability; poverty from missing education and displacement. A comprehensive psycho-social and economic approach must be considered in building a commemorative culture. While having a physical plaque or memorial is important in commemorations, stone in itself does not provide basic needs for those who have experienced human rights violations.

### **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

Whether through civic education, creative activities, or through public activities at the State level, engaging young people in commemorations connects them to a past they might not have physically been alive in, but which very much affects their existence. Establishing or supporting civic and accessible education, for example, can encourage young people of different social, economic, cultural, and regional backgrounds to better connect with survivors, and understand human rights mechanisms and knowledge in a local context, therefore filling the gap in the national education system. Building a generational bridge has mutual benefits for young people and survivors in the struggle for justice for human rights violations. Young people are also more inclined to commit to non-recurrence of conflict when they fully relate to the long term implications.

### **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING BETWEEN PARTIES**

Commemoration and reparations is a complex matter that requires long term cooperation between key stakeholders. Institutions, CSOs, the Church, and survivors and victims' families all have a unique role to play in strengthening the objectives of peacebuilding or establishing mechanisms for non-recurrence. Building these relationships can be done through working groups on various topics, joint advocacy, committees, or local meetings.

### **CREATIVE COMMEMORATIONS**

Several creative methods employed by AJAR and other CSOs that have encouraged dialogue and formation of youth mutual aid groups have included commemoration activities, exhibitions, photo essays, short videos, poetry, art, zine making, songwriting and quizzes. These are some of the activities that have shown the most participatory and engaging commemorations of events.

## REFERENCES

- Asia Justice & Rights (AJAR). Marabia Memorial Exhibition. 2020. Accessed at <https://asia-ajar.org/survivor-story/marabia-memorial-online-exhibition/>
- Aliansa Nasional Timor-Leste Ba Tribunál Internasionál (A-N-T-I). Press Release: 34th Commemoration of the Marabia Incident (10 June 1980- 2014) and International Widows Day (23 June 2014).” *Lao Hamutuk*. 2014. Accessed at <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/ANTI/2014/ANTIMarabia23Jun2014en.pdf>
- Asia Justice & Rights (AJAR). “Marabia Memorial.” 2019. Accessed at <https://asia-ajar.org/survivor-story/marabia-memorial-online-exhibition/>
- Asosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita (ACbit). “Stories from The Past for Future Hope: Commemorating Torture Sites and the Experiences of Women Victims of Torture in Dili, Timor-Leste”. 2015. Accessed at <https://chegabaita.org/blog/event-activities/commemorations-events/stories-from-the-past-for-future-hope-a-story-from-woman-commemoration-stories-activity-in-dili/>
- Asosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita (ACbit). “Suai Massacre Commemoration.” 2019. Accessed at <https://chegabaita.org/blog/event-activities/suai-massacre-commemoration-2018/#:~:text=On%20the%206th%20of%20September,their%20stories%20with%20the%20community.>
- Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. “Bishop Belo to mark first anniversary of Suai massacre in East Timor”. 2000. Accessed at <https://reliefweb.int/report/timor-leste/bishop-belo-mark-first-anniversary-suai-massacre-east-timor>
- East Timor & Indonesia Action Network (ETAN). “Background on September 6, 1999 Suai Massacre.” 2001. Accessed at <https://www.etan.org/news/2001a/09suai.htm>
- East Timor & Indonesia Action Network (ETAN). “Robinson rides into storm over Suai massacre” (Originally by The Age, August 26). 2002. Accessed at <http://etan.org/et2002c/august/25-31/26robson.htm>
- International Coalitions of Site of Conscience., “Centro Nacional Chega! (Timor-Leste).” 2022. Accessed at <https://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/membership/centro-nacional-chega-timor-leste/>
- Klinken, Gerry. “Death by deprivation in East Timor, 1975-1980.” 2012. Accessed at <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2012/04/17/death-by-deprivation-in-east-timor-1975-1980/>
- Lao Hamutuk, “Excerpt from Chega! The report of the CAVR, chapter 7.2 on Unlawful Killings and Forced Disappearances.” 2003. Accessed at <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/99/bere/CAVRSuaiChurch.pdf>
- Lao Hamutuk. “Briefing Paper: Justice for Timor-Leste Remains an Unfulfilled International Obligation.” 2009. Accessed at <https://www.laohamutuk.org/reports/09bgnd/JusticeEn.pdf>
- Media Presidencia da Republica., “H.E President Taur Matan Ruak lays the first stone for the construction of a memorial in honour of the tragedy of Marabia, 1980.” 2015. Accessed at <https://presidenciarepublica.tl/2015/06/h-e-pr-taur-matan-ruak-lays-the-first-stone-for-the-construction-of-a-memorial-in-honour-of-the-tragedy-of-marabia-1980/?lang=en>

- Pereira, Januario. "CO25 hamutuk ho CNC.IP Realiza seminariu hodi hanoi hikas laron 10 de junho "Levantamentu Marabia." 2022. Accessed at <https://comiteorientador25.org/2022/06/09/co25-hamutuk-ho-cnc-ip-realiza-seminariu-hodi-hanoin-hikas-laron-10-de-junho-levantamentu-marabia/#more-851>
- Robinson, Geoffrey. "East Timor 1999 Crimes against Humanity." 2003. Accessed at <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/99/bere/SuaiChurchMassacreGRobinson.pdf>
- STL News., "Taur Lansa Fatuk Dahuluk Monumentu Marabia." 2015. Accessed at <https://stlnews.co/top-news/taur-lansa-fatuk-dahuluk-monumentu-marabia/>
- Tatoli, 2022. "Historical Site Visit essential to growing nationalism and patriotism among public officials". 2022. Accessed at <http://www.tatoli.tl/en/2022/06/22/historical-site-visit-essential-to-growing-nationalism-and-patriotism-among-public-officials/>
- Timor Archives. "Centro Nasional Chega! director visits CHART." 2019. Accessed at <https://timorarchives.wordpress.com/2019/02/08/cnc-director-visits-chart/>
- Timor-Leste Government. "Commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the Day of the Popular Consultation of August 30, 1999-2014." 2015. Accessed at <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=10578&print=1&lang=en>
- Jose Luis Oliveira, June 2022. Interview on the topic of CSO involvement in the Marabia and Dark September/Suai commemorations.
- Four survivors from Suai, July 2022. Interview on the topic of their experiences during the occupation, the year 1999, and their plans to form a commission.
- Speeches by Members of the *Comite Orientador 25* and Marabia Committee at Marabia 10th June Commemoration, 2022. Source: Salvador Da Costa, Researcher at *Comite Orientador 25*



**GIJTR**

Global Initiative for Justice  
Truth & Reconciliation