

Obituary Drs. Frans Seda 1926 – 2010



Frans Seda was the quintessential good neighbour; he believed that it was in the mutual interest of Indonesia and Australia to get on; that ours was a symbiotic relationship driven by necessity. Franciscus Xaverius *aka* Frans Seda was an enigma; a Catholic from Flores in the Eastern Provinces and the only person to serve in both the Soekarno and Suharto Ministries. He was a freedom fighter, Minister, Diplomat, respected economist, author, successful entrepreneur and the Territory's man in Indonesia. It was in this later capacity that he worked with a succession of Territory public servants, Ministers and

Chief Ministers of both political hues. Honoured by the Republic of Indonesia Frans was also a Papal Knight and in 1999 was conferred a Member of the Order of Australia for *'strengthening trade links between Australia and Indonesia'*. He did much more than that.

Born in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara on 4 October 1926 he died aged 83 having lived an exciting and at times dangerous life. When the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) launched their pre-emptive Communist coup in the mid 1960's Frans told me he knew he was on the list to be picked up by the death squads. He quietly left for his deserted Government Office where he awaited his fate. He made it widely known that he would be at work that day to protect his family in case the *'plotters'* went to his home. They never came as Suharto and the generals moved to restore Order. Notwithstanding he remained a measured critic of Suharto over the years and of the endemic corruption that pervaded the Indonesian political system. Frans once remarked to me in Jakarta when I was expressing frustration with the Government *'Great Britain may have ruled the waves but Indonesia waved the rules'*. He had this incredible ability to reassure and calm the most challenging situation. He was absolutely fearless in confronting corrupt officials and practices that impeded the Indonesian Territory partnership. His patience

and understanding were among his greatest virtues. Most importantly he defined and '*coached*' the way we operated not only in Indonesia but throughout SE Asia such was his standing and stature – we listened and we learned.

His early introduction to Indonesia politics was in getting to know Soekarno as a youngster when the Dutch exiled the independence leader to Flores. This relationship would endure from father to daughter as Frans later became a trusted adviser to Megawatti Sukarnoputri. How easy it might have been for Frans having completed his further education in Holland to follow another more comfortable course in Europe. Instead after the defeat of the Japanese in WW2 and the founding of The Republic he had already played a role in the independence movement with the Indonesian Youth Congress. This experience gave him a unique and lasting insight into the power and influence of the students. By 1956 he was the Military Governor of Economic Advisers Nusa Tenggara Denpasar, Bali. Between 1961 – 68 he was Chairman of the Indonesian Catholic Party. He joined the Soekarno Cabinet as Minister for Plantations (1963-66); thereafter he served Suharto as Agriculture Minister and Minister of Finance (1966-68) and later Minister for Transportation and Tourism (1968-1973). President Suharto once remarked to me that as Finance Minister Frans saved Indonesia during the fledgling Nations first financial crisis as he alone had the credibility to carry the day in the International banking community.

Following on from his Ministerial career Frans was appointed Indonesian Ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg and also Indonesia's chief representative to the European Union in Brussels between 1968 and 1973. He told me that after this brief interlude he wanted to come back home as he considered there was unfinished business in his beloved Flores.

It was because of his passionate belief in the development of the Eastern Provinces, a back water of the Republic that brought him into Australia's orbit. He was well aware that the Australian trade union movement had played an important role in blockading Dutch ships after WW2 as the former colonial power sought to reassert control in the Indonesia; it was Australia who first recognised the Republic and he reckoned Australia

was the Eastern Provinces best bet for growth and development and so he settled on us – Australia's Northern Territory. In retrospect it was a big call.



Asian Relations & Trade Minister STONE with NT Representative Drs. Frans SEDA in Jakarta 23 April 1993

Dating from Self Government successive Chief Ministers from Paul Everingham to Ian Tuxworth and Steve Hatton cut a swath through the region. It was Steve Hatton and Barry Coulter who forged the initial relationship with Frans; Steve Hatton became a strong advocate of Frans and when Marshall Perron took the visionary step of establishing the first Ministry of Asian Relations and Trade with me as Minister Frans was part of the package. He was the '*gatekeeper*', the man who could get us right to the top. The NT had arrived in Indonesia – education and training through AUSAID; student and teacher exchanges; malaria prevention programmes through MENZIES School of Health; retraining of subsistence fisherman to deter them from our northern waters;

primary industry projects that under Mick Palmer led to the biggest live export of cattle numbers ever; export and import deals across all sectors we only ever dreamed of; preferential shipping routes; the Darwin EXPO that became the feature event of the region to the point where Trade Ministers made it their Annual Ministerial Council meeting; a role in BIMP EAGA which paved the way for Australia's greater engagement in ASEAN.



The Official Opening of the new NT Office Jakarta attended by Minister BURKE, CM STONE & Minister MANZIE circa 1997

Frans Seda was there for the entire journey from the historic Eastern Provinces NT MOU to the forum that Australian Prime Ministers now take for granted. As former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans once conceded the Territory *'punched way above its weight'*.

In his retirement Franz continued to play a defining role in Indonesian politics. As a Commissioner (Director) of the giant media group Kompas Gramedia Group dating from 1970 and as Chairman of the Atma Jaya Foundation which managed the Atma Jaya Catholic University he remained a vocal advocate for pluralism and diversity in the world's largest Muslim country. He was an adviser to every President of Indonesia although not all heeded his wise counsel. Had his active advocacy for a truly autonomous East Timor been accepted the Republic would have remained intact. East Timor was among the first to convey their condolences on Fran's passing. Writing in 1996 he had argued that autonomy was a constitutional right open to both East Timor and Irian Jaya.

As the tributes flowed the commentary by former Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court of Indonesian Jimly Asshiddiqie resonated with many of his countrymen when he declared that both Gus Dur (Wahid) and Frans Seda deserved to be crowned as *'national heroes'*. *"We have lost two great figures. They showed us how to build a Nation. They are pluralism figures and deserved to be crowned national heroes"*. Frans admired Australia for who we are; diverse and plural. He believed the cosmopolitan mix of Darwin was unique and special. We Territorians could not have found a greater advocate.

His continuing staunch loyalty to Megawatti even when she ignored his counsel and his father figure role in her political career ensures that he will always be revered in the PDI, successors to the Indonesian Catholic Party.

From time to time I pressed Frans about those fateful events of the mid 1960's; he would provide snippets but little else, for him this was a painful period in Indonesia's emergence as a Nation, best left behind. On the last occasion we spoke Frans volunteered *'look who wasn't on the list'*.

As I sat on my balcony in Darwin on News Eve I raised a glass to Frans and two other good Indonesian friends of the Territory we lost this year – former Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and former President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur); just perhaps they organised their own reunion.

A condolence Motion in the Legislative Assembly would be a much deserved acknowledgement of this outstanding friend, supporter and advocate of our Territory.

He was accorded a State Funeral on Saturday 2 January 2010 with full military honours and interned at the San Diego Hills Cemetery Kerawang West Java.

A devout family man, husband and father Frans is survived by his wife Yohanna Maria Pattinaya and two daughters Francisca Xaveria Sika Seda (Ery) and Yoanessa Maria Yosea Sipi Seda (Nessa).

Rest in peace old friend - beristirahat dalam damai teman lama.

Shane L Stone
Former Chief Minister & Minister for Asian Relations and Trade
Australia's Northern Territory