

# NEWS RELEASE



September 5, 2005

## COMMEMORATION OF 6<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF SUAI MASSACRE

**Photo Op: Balthasar Kehi will sing a *lia nain* from Fatumea.**

**10.30am, Tuesday September 6 – St Kilda Town Hall lawn**

The City of Port Phillip will commemorate the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre of three priests and 200 local men, women and children at the Suai church school in East Timor with a ceremony at 10.30am, Tuesday September 6 on the St Kilda Town Hall lawn.

The Port Phillip community has entered into a ten-year partnership to help rebuild Suai, a coastal town near the West Timor border, which suffered some of the worst excesses after the pro-independence vote in 1999. Over the following year, survivors placed rocks outside the cathedral in Suai until they formed a circle around the place where the bodies were burned after the massacre.

To mark the massacre's anniversary, East Timorese priest, Balthasar Kehi will sing a *lia nain*, a lament, from Fatumea. Mr Kehi, a former Catholic priest, is a member of the Friends of Suai and said at the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the massacre, "Crimes against humanity are crimes against all of us, crimes against our sense of decency and justice.

"The purpose of keeping the memory of the brutality alive is not just to show our solidarity with the victims, but more importantly to condemn those acts of cruelty and to prevent their repetition anywhere in the world. Repetition can only be prevented if those who are guilty of the crime are brought to justice at national or international level, through national and international courts...[But] instead of being brought to justice, the perpetrators have been promoted and hailed as national heroes, defenders of national territorial integrity of Indonesia."

Mr Kehi will be joined on the steps of St Kilda Town Hall by Friends of Suai treasurer, former councillor David Brand. Mr Brand visited the site of the massacre in Suai in February 2000 as part of a team of architects and planners invited by the National Council for East Timorese Resistance (CNRT) leader, Xanana Gusmao, now Timor Leste's President.

“Despite watching numerous television news reports, it was impossible from this distance to envisage the immense scale of the destruction. In Suai, almost every building had been burnt out by the Indonesians and militia, leaving only charred floors and the odd column. There was no electricity and the water had been contaminated by diesel or rubbish or dead bodies.

“But if the devastation was staggering, the spirit of the people was amazing. Standing in the ashes and the debris were the East Timorese people with their wall-to-wall smiles and waving children. At least outwardly, they radiated new hope and optimism.

“Now, six years on from the scene of this horrific event, life goes on. It’s still very tough but people are working together to create a new future for Suai and East Timor. However, it is a scandal that not one person has been brought to justice for the massacre,” he said.

Deputy mayor, Janet Bolitho, said that rebuilding in Suai was slow and not helped by drought and failure of crops in the last two wet seasons.

“Friends of Suai is doing all it can to support the people of Suai in their efforts to claim a new future. We provide funding to the Suai Community Centre and the Suai Youth Centre. East Timor is the world’s youngest country and has the youngest population of any country in the world.

“In the past twelve months, we’ve also funded a nutrition program based at Suai Regional Hospital in partnership with Balwyn Rotary Club, a reforestation project, and vocational training in mechanics for unemployed youth. Sewing classes for widows are being held with the aim of forming a women’s sewing cooperative. The Suai youth centre also runs computer classes and English-language classes. We’ve also sponsored a district youth congress in Cova Lima, the area surrounding Suai. The Suai youth coordinator, Ergilio Vincente, recently visited Port Phillip,” she said.

In the pipeline are projects involving agriculture, youth media and community radio.

A Port Phillip film maker and cultural activist, Jen Hughes, filmed the first commemoration of the massacre in Suai, and her ten-minute film, *The Circle of Stones*, can be sampled at

[www.crimsonthreads.org](http://www.crimsonthreads.org)

**Enquiries:**

Carmel Shute

Media Officer

Tel: 9209 6163

Mobile: 0412 569 356

Council webpage: [www.portphillip.vic.gov.au](http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au)

**After hours**

Cr Janet Bolitho

Deputy mayor

Ph: 9645 4754

Mobile: 0411 096 400