

# NEWS RELEASE



June 13, 2006

## **DRAMA FOR PEACE IN EAST TIMOR**

**7pm Thursday June 22 – Theatreworks, 14 Acland St., St Kilda**

Friends of Suai, the Port Phillip community group helping rebuild the East Timorese town of Suai, is hosting a night of film, poetry, music and talk to raise money for the Dili-based drama troupe, Bibi Bulak (the Crazy Goats), to perform refugee camps.

The fundraiser, to be held at 7pm Thursday June 22 at Theatreworks, 14 Acland St., St Kilda will feature a talk by Annie Sloman, the arts administrator and theatre circus trainer at Bibi Bulak, a short performance from Bibi Bulak on film, and poetry and music by Melchior Dias Fernandez (Mely), the lead singer of one of Timor's most well known bands, Galaxy.

Admission is by gold coin donation and tickets are available at the door.

Ms Sloman, who was recently evacuated to Melbourne due to the violence in Dili, is using her time here to talk about the work of Bibi Bulak and raise money.

"While the country is in crisis, the emerging art scene in East Timor is working overtime to help empower the youth and keep people's minds on positive peaceful ways to deal with their trauma," she says.

"Bibi Bulak, which is composed mostly of young people, wants to perform at the thirty or forty refugee camps that have sprung up in and around Dili. The performances will promote messages about health and women's leadership as well as simply just providing entertainment to take people's minds of what is going on around them. We hope it will help heal people who have already been through so much.

"Our group is mostly young people and we want to say loud and clear that young people have a lot to contribute. They're not all troublemakers. They can shine a light on the long road to peace."

East Timorese artist, musician and writer Melchior Dias Fernandez is also in Melbourne, following performances at the Sydney and Darwin Writers' Festivals. He's usually based at the Arte Moris (Living Art) Cultural Centre, home to both Bibi Bulak and the free art school, Arte Moris.

Throughout the recent crisis the art school, Arte Moris, and performance group Bibi Bulak have carried on, running workshops and performances in the camps. Arte Moris has also become a refugee camp itself with over 600 people currently camped at the cultural centre.

Ms Sloman said she'd been in regular contact with her friends and workmates in Dili since her evacuation. "I rang Arte Moris the other day and the students were in the midst of a class, trying to carry on their lives as normally as possible despite the gunfire in the background."

"Many of the students' families lost everything when their houses burnt down, so they're now living at the centre. Arte Moris is using all its reserves earmarked for art supplies and classes to feed the refugees," she said.

According to Ms Sloman, Bibi Bulak and Arte Moris have become havens for the young people of East Timor since being set up in 2000 and 2003 respectively.

"Bibi Bulak and Arte Moris have attracted everyone from street kids to gang members, ex-Falintil fighters, young women, students, and even taxi drivers. The arts have proved a positive way to channel their energy and provide hope for the future.

"Many of the students say if it weren't for these organisations, they would be out on the street creating the violence that is currently engulfing Dili. Bibi Bulak and Arte Moris give them a voice as well as a living."

Ms Sloman said that youth are the forgotten people in East Timor. "Half the population is under the age of 21 and around 75 per cent, I think, are under the age of 27," she said.

"Unemployment amongst young people is up to 80 per cent. Most were educated under the Indonesian system so don't speak Portuguese or English, virtually making it impossible to get a decent job. On top of this, the government and many of the aid agencies appear to have largely forgotten them. They are incredibly disillusioned and disempowered. Many see no future.

"It's simply great that Bibi Bulak want to try and do something positive within this entire catastrophe."

When life settles down again, Bibi Bulak will set up the first theatre group in Suai, a coastal town near the border with West Timor. Funded by Friends of Suai, it will be based at the Suai Youth Centre.

**Enquiries:**

Carmel Shute

Media Officer

Tel: 03 9209 6163

Mobile: 0412 569 356

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