

Profile:

Kirsty Sword Gusmão

by Lesley McFarlane, AM

Kirsty Sword (Gusmão) was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1966. She grew up in Melbourne and Bendigo and attended Melbourne University where she completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours), majoring in Indonesian and Italian, and a Diploma of Education.

In 1991, after working as an Administrative Secretary with the Overseas Service Bureau (Australian Volunteers International), she joined the *Refugee Studies Program* at Oxford University as Assistant to the Development Co-ordinator. During 1991, she travelled to East Timor as the Researcher/Interpreter for the Yorkshire Television documentary film, *In Cold Blood: The massacre of East Timor*, concerning political and social developments in the territory.

From 1992 to 1996, she lived and worked as a teacher and human rights campaigner in Jakarta, Indonesia. It was during these years that her work for the East Timorese independence cause intensified and brought her into contact with the independence leader, Xanana Gusmão, who was serving a 20-year sentence in a Jakarta jail and whom she married in July 2000.

She has lived in East Timor since October 1999 and is the Founder and Chairwoman of the Alola Foundation which she established in 2001 to address the needs of East Timorese women and their families.

Alola's programs have expanded rapidly since then and have been in great demand since the crisis began in East Timor in April 2006.

- The *Education Program* has been able to provide scholarships for young people of needy families, encouraging their continuance of schooling. The *Friendships Schools Project* links primary and secondary schools in Australia with schools in East Timor.
- The *Maternal and Child Health Program* works to help contribute to a reduction in the maternal and child mortality rates by promoting good health for women and their communities. Throughout the crisis the MCH team has been very active giving help to new mothers



through the distribution of Maternity Packs at Dili and Baucau hospitals, and through breast-feeding promotion and education activities.

- The *Women's Resource Centre* staff provide resources, information and referral services to women and their families, particularly in the areas of domestic violence, maternal and child health, and accessing humanitarian assistance.
- The *Economic Empowerment Program* has been fostering the handcrafts industry and international marketing of traditional tais (weaving) and tais products.

Kirsty was appointed by the President, Dr Jose Ramos Horta, as Goodwill Ambassador for Education in October 2007. This appointment was in recognition of Kirsty's tireless efforts to date, and to formalise future endeavours in addressing the educational priorities of Timor-Leste.

She is Co-Chairperson of the National Education Commission and represents UNESCO, Timor-Leste at international forums.

Kirsty has three sons, Alexandre (9 years), Kay Olok (7 years) and Daniel (5 years).

Information about the work of the Alola Foundation can be found on the website: <http://www.alolafoundation.org>.