

# International News Notes

Edited by Evelyn Wareham

## Archives Situation in Timor Leste

*Correspondent: Delene Cuddihy, Archivist at the Timor Leste Truth, Reception and Reconciliation Commission 2003-2005.*

The archival situation in Timor Leste hit world headlines in May and June 2006 with the looting of records from the Attorney-General's Office. These were the records of the Serious Crimes Unit which was established by the United Nations (UN) in order to investigate and prosecute those who committed serious crimes during East Timor's rough transition to independence in 1999.

Aside from the loss of life at this time, 1999 witnessed the wholesale destruction of over seventy-five per cent of all institutions and infrastructure including the National Museum, libraries, galleries and collections of records. There were no archival institutions at this time.

Since 1999, the small nation worked hard to establish national cultural institutions as well as basic services and infrastructure such as education, schools, health services and clinics, with very little money. A National Archives was established and it inherited various fragments of records collections post-1999 picked up from the streets, from abandoned and burned offices and from attics of remaining buildings. It does not have a dedicated archival building and is desperately in need of basic archival equipment such as shelving and boxes. To date there is no National Library although the staff of several libraries and archives have joined to create a fledgling Timor Leste Library and Information Association.

The recent looting of the Serious Crimes records and the break-in and theft of motorbikes from the offices of the former Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CAVR), which also houses its archives, however, highlight the fragility and vulnerability of important sets of records to opportunistic and/or targeted looting and destruction in times of political instability.

The building where CAVR archives are held was a former Portuguese and later Indonesian jail, named Comarca, holding political, military and civilian prisoners at various times in its history. It was renovated especially for the Truth Commission, with significant heritage features left intact. The un-renovated Isolation Cells, with their defiant graffiti and prayers for help, still exude an aura of gritty determination and desperate hope. The building is a powerful reminder, a living reminder of the long and hard struggle for independence from over four hundred years of colonialism and occupation.

Following the break-in at Comarca, an urgent call for help went out via the international community, including the Aus-archivists listserv to authorities responsible for peacekeeping. Swift actions followed with Australian peacekeeping troops allocated dedicated security duties at Comarca. In fact, recent news from Pat Walsh, the Australian born advisor to the Commission, reveals that the troops are still ensconced at CAVR – ‘making us all feel safer than the Bank of England’. News is not to hand as to the security of other archival institutions in Dili – including the National Archives.

The archives of CAVR were established with help from Australian archivists, librarians and museum professionals. I obtained leave of absence from my job as archivist at Queensland Rail and worked with local staff for nearly two years to establish and manage the collection of records created by the Commission. Several librarians came to work in the library on shorter projects as self-funded volunteers. The New South Wales Branch of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) allocated funds from a fundraising event and the Queensland Branch sent a large ‘conservation care pack’. Victoria Branch members arranged visits to arrival institution for one of the CAVR archives staff members who was visiting on a Rotary Youth Leadership course. The South East Asia and Pacific Audiovisual Archives Association (SEAPAVAA) is scheduled to undertake audiovisual archival training later in the year with UNESCO funding – in order to help the fledgling archival community deal with the special needs of audiovisual material in a country where humidity is

high in the wet season, dust is ubiquitous in the dry season and electricity is intermittent in all seasons.

Museum professionals Rae Sheridan and Lucy Prior have worked on displays with material from the archival collection which will be used for memorialisation purposes at Comarca and to accompany the Final Report of the truth and reconciliation commission to country areas where literacy rates are very low, especially among women. In his address to the nation on July 10 this year, the new Prime Minister Jose Ramos Horta, explained that 'The extensive CAVR Report is an encyclopedia of our history, both rich in teachings and suffering. We must utilise its great teachings to better understand today's crises and to help prevent future crises'. Surely, this is a major innovation in today's modern world in the deliberate use of records to consciously contribute to reconciliation and nation building.

Permission from the National Archives and the Government has been given for the post-CAVR body to continue to house the records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at Comarca and to use them in reconciliation and memorialisation activity. The importance of preserving the archives was mentioned in the Foreword to the Final Report by the Chair of CAVR Aniceto Guterres Lopes: 'These records are unique and must be preserved with great care – they are the living testimony of victims and key actors from a period that witnessed both the painful birth of this nation and a shameful chapter in international politics'.

It is hoped that an international assessment of the status of archival institutions in Timor Leste will be able to be undertaken shortly by the International Council on Archives (ICA), in order to ascertain the current situation of archives in Timor Leste and their needs. In the immediate aftermath of 1999, some archival help came in from overseas countries including Australia (the National Archives of Australia and Northern Territory), Brazil, Malaysia and Portugal. However, an international assessment was not done at this time. As the country attempts to stabilise itself after recent political upheavals, it is timely that an assessment be undertaken in order to coordinate, identify and prioritise the most effective solidarity actions from the international archives community. A professional assessment of the archival needs of the country would help government officials to develop an overall archival strategy for the country and would also help various aid organisations to prioritise funding requests.

An Australian-Timor Leste archival solidarity group has formed out of the recent discussions on the Aus-archivists listserv. We are working towards an archivist from Timor Leste giving a presentation at the annual conference of the Australian Society of Archivists on the importance of archives to document human rights abuses and their role in reconciliation and the development of national identity. [Editor's note: this was brought to fruition at the annual ASA conference, Port Maquarie, 2006.]

## **Recordkeeping Policy and Procedures for Solomon Islands Government**

*Correspondent: Danielle Wickman, Technical Adviser, Recordkeeping, Machinery of Government Programme, Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)*

The 2005 conference of the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA), held in Nadi, Fiji, had the theme 'Recordkeeping for Good Governance'. Among its resolutions, the conference called on Pacific governments to:

- Develop national recordkeeping strategies in support of good governance.
- Raise awareness of the role archives have in supporting improvements to records management systems.

The National Archives of Solomon Islands is rising to these challenges, through the assistance of the National Archives of Australia and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The conference resolutions were instrumental in encouraging the Solomon Islands government to seek assistance from RAMSI to improve its recordkeeping performance.

The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands is more than just a police presence. The Law and Justice program includes providing advice and assistance in managing prisons, and provision and training of legal personnel such as magistrates, judges, public defenders and crown prosecutors. The Economic Governance program assists the Solomon Islands Government with budget and financial management issues, including tax administration and customs services. The third arm of RAMSI is the Machinery of Government programme, which aims to rebuild and improve key accountability institutions such as the

Auditor-General's office and the Ombudsman and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service.

The National Archives' recordkeeping project sits within this Machinery of Government program. This placement – and the fact that the Archives is included in the RAMSI aid package – is an acknowledgement of the key role recordkeeping has in supporting efficient and accountable government.

Poor recordkeeping in the Solomon Islands Government has been caused by, and in turn has caused, the kinds of difficulties that archivists around the world have identified. There is very little profile for the Archives within government, with a number of key positions having been vacant for long periods and insufficient priority being given to recruitment. There is poor infrastructure for managing and storing records, both in the Archives and throughout government. Every department experiences records storage difficulties. There is little understanding of the importance of recordkeeping or of the central role that a government archive can play. The Auditor-General is often unable to complete effective audits due to poor record keeping, and is becoming something of a champion of the recordkeeping cause.

The project began with a baseline study examining the existing capacity for recordkeeping in Solomon Islands government agencies. This revealed that the traditional registry system which exists in all departments is a good model and has operated well. The registry system does not, however, control all of the records of the Solomon Islands government. Much government decision-making goes unrecorded because of insufficient awareness among public servants generally of the need to document their actions or of the appropriate processes for achieving this.

The key records management issues identified in the report can be largely divided into four categories. The first of these is awareness. There is only a general awareness of the importance of recordkeeping, and there is no overarching records management policy for the Solomon Islands government, and few administrative procedures are documented within departments. All staff need more guidance on when they should create and keep records.

The second category relates to tracking the creation and movement of files. Most departments do not have adequate control over their records. Departmental registries often only have direct control over administrative

files such as personnel records. The majority of other records are managed by divisional units outside the registries. This means that no department has a comprehensive picture of its own records holdings. In addition, there are no comprehensive systems for tracking the movement of files within departments.

The third category of issues to be addressed is records disposal. The system for making disposal decisions about government records is undocumented, and is likely to keep many files for much longer than they are really required. This leads to storage and preservation problems, as departments do not have adequate facilities to store large quantities of transactional records that would probably be scheduled for destruction if properly appraised. This in turn puts at risk more significant records, as the bulk of records being stored for long periods makes it difficult both to determine which are the significant records and to provide good storage conditions where it counts.

Finally, the fourth category relates to structure and performance management. While individual staff performance is assessed and reported on, there are no systems in place for monitoring the performance of systems and structures like records management units. This means that failures in systems and procedures aren't easily identified, allowing records management processes to lose their relevance to the business processes they are trying to support.

The study identified a number of possible projects that could address these issues, including the development of records management awareness training for public servants, improvements to the efficiency and accountability of the records disposal regime, and the revision and expansion of existing government-wide records management procedures.

The National Archives of Solomon Islands, with assistance from RAMSI, is now pursuing the last of these projects. An updated registry manual will provide guidance for all Solomon Islands government departments, and help to address problems with the tracking and management of files, as registry staff would have more up to date instructions on records management. More detailed guidance will also be provided to staff on how they should ensure that correspondence, emails, file notes and other documents they create as part of their work should be managed in the filing system. The inclusion of a government records management policy

will also help to raise the awareness of staff generally on the importance of recordkeeping. The manual will provide guidance to departments on how to set up and manage their registries, so that some of the structural and performance management problems identified can also be addressed.

The project will revise, update and expand the existing Solomon Islands Government Manual of Registry Procedures. The updated manual will include:

- A records management policy for the whole of the Solomon Islands Government.
- Guidance on the structure and range of responsibilities of records management units and the skills and experience required of staff.
- Updated procedures for managing the creation, capture and movement of records within departments.
- Guidelines on making decisions about access to government records, both within the department and to the public through the Archives.
- Advice on correct storage and handling of departmental records.
- Instructions for departments on records disposal arrangements.
- Performance measures and reporting requirements for records management units.

The Manual will not, of course, solve all of the records management issues raised by the baseline report. In particular, more comprehensive training in records management will need to be developed, both to enable records staff to implement the new Manual and to improve the awareness of other staff of their recordkeeping responsibilities. In addition, the Manual does not of itself address the problems identified in the records disposal regime. It does, however, begin to address some of the most pressing problems identified in the baseline report, and does so by building on existing knowledge and systems. It also goes some way toward fulfilling PARBICA's resolutions, by developing whole-of-government recordkeeping procedures and standards that support good governance. The involvement of the National Archives in this important

contribution to ensure effective and accountable government also helps to position the National Archives of Solomon Islands as one of the key governance institutions with a role in records management across government.

## **International Council on Archives Campaign to Establish an International Archives Day**

*Correspondent: David Leitch, Senior Programme Manager, International Council on Archives*

Why does ICA believe so strongly that it is important to establish an International Archives Day? The answer is that many members of the general public have only the vaguest idea about the true nature of our profession – for them the term ‘archives’ often calls to mind dust covered documents that are hundreds of years old, with handwriting that can be read only by a very few antiquarians. By and large it is not recognised that some of today’s records, many of which are created electronically, will become tomorrow’s archives, and that archives created on more traditional media can be copied and made much more accessible via the Internet. Understandably, many of our fellow citizens do not understand the crucial role of effective records management in underpinning good governance, administrative transparency, and the protection of human rights.

Part of the purpose of an International Archives Day would be to raise public awareness of the many responsibilities carried out by records and archives professionals with wider political and societal significance. It would provide an opportunity to drive home the message that archives need to be preserved permanently, and arrangements should be made for easy and swift public access to them. By drawing attention to the historical treasures that lie neglected in many archive services, an International Archives Day would also kindle the public’s enthusiasm for archives and prompt some of them to become regular users of archives for the first time. From a professional point of view, this initiative would encourage archive professionals who work in relative isolation to develop new contacts and there would also be the possibility of creating new partnerships with professionals working in other fields, especially the media.



In recent years, ICA has been gradually increasing the momentum in favour of an International Archives Day. In 2002, the 36<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Round Table on Archives was held in Marseille, France, on the theme *How Society Perceives Archives*. It was agreed that there was an alarming gap between the antiquated image of archive services and the wide range of important functions which they actually carry out. Accordingly, the 237 attendees from national archives and national professional associations passed a resolution inviting ICA to organise an International Archives Day in order to improve the public perception of archives and archive services. In 2004 a similarly worded resolution was adopted at the International Congress on Archives in Vienna, in which the 2000 participants asked the relevant authorities of the United Nations to organise an International Archives Day. The establishment of an International Archives Day is now one of the major goals in ICA's Priority Area for Advocacy and Protection in the period from 2004 and 2008.

An opportunity to convert this mounting pressure into concrete achievement occurred as a result of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in October 2005, when it was decided in principle that 27 October should be declared the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage. ICA fully recognised that there are benefits in raising public awareness of the importance of audiovisual archives, not least in terms of improved arrangements for their long-term care. However, it was also quite clear that all archives, whatever their format, are equally deserving of public attention and political support. In March 2006, therefore, it sought and obtained the support of the Intergovernmental Council for the UNESCO Information for All Programme (IFAP) to widen the scope of the proposed World Day to include all archives, whatever their medium and format. The Council suggested that this ICA proposal should be included in the forthcoming feasibility study concerning the World Day for the Audiovisual Heritage.

In June 2006, UNESCO launched this study and entrusted it to Ray Edmondson, an Australian expert on audiovisual archives. The accompanying questionnaire on the UNESCO website also focused essentially on the audiovisual heritage. At this stage ICA had to reflect quite carefully on how to respond. On the one hand, there were clear signals from UNESCO officials that it might be difficult to set up yet another World Day specifically for Archives in the increasingly congested

calendar of World Days. Against this, however, ICA strongly believed that it was essential to highlight the cultural value of all forms of archives. In addition, it might be difficult to make the argument for good records management throughout the public and private sectors if this issue was overshadowed by preservation of the audiovisual heritage. Finally, it was felt that the emphatic expression of the collective will of ICA members in favour of a specific International Archives Day, as represented by the resolution passed by the Vienna Congress in 2004, could not be ignored.

In July 2006, ICA orchestrated a letter-writing campaign so that UNESCO would be left in no doubt whatsoever about the strength of feeling in the profession throughout the world in favour of the early establishment of an International Archives Day. At the time of writing this note (early August), the impact of this campaign is not clear, but there are high hopes that Mr Edmondson will make the establishment of a specific International Archives Day one of the recommendations of his report, which is due for publication in September.

Whatever the outcome of this consultation, the Executive Board of ICA is determined to press ahead with establishing an International Archives Day (or Days) in 2007. One key issue yet to be resolved is – what is the most appropriate day to hold this event? Clearly, it is important to avoid clashes with existing celebrations of this kind, such as International Museums Day (18 May) or the UN-sponsored World Book Day (23 April). In addition, archivists in many countries have already developed publicity campaigns suited to their particular circumstances, sometimes stretching over weeks and months, at different times of year. A quick survey carried out on behalf of ICA by Christer Bogefeldt (Sweden) in the summer of 2005 confirmed the considerable diversity in the time of existing publicity campaigns in different countries but also underlined the continuing enthusiasm for an International Archives Day. So the first step is to obtain agreement about the date that is suitable for most countries. However, there is always a risk that, once a date for International Archives Day has been agreed and publicised in many nations, archivists will make a major publicity effort only once a year and fail to publicise their work on a much more frequent basis.

The experience of the United Kingdom indicates that, although an International Archives Day would provide a welcome boost to other publicity efforts, archivists need to be more publicity conscious at other times of year if archive sources and the work of archive professionals are

to achieve the higher public profile that they deserve. For the last three years, the National Council on Archives, supported by The National Archives and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, has organised an Archive Awareness Campaign (originally for a month but now spread over about three months after the first successful campaign in 2003). Participating archive services organise a series of events throughout the country on the given theme for the year (previous themes include 'love and hate' and the one chosen for 2006 is 'neighbourhoods and woods'), which may be broadly interpreted. Members of the public can obtain more information about events going on in their area from the campaign's website <<http://www.archiveawareness.com>>, with the distinctive logo that is also used to brand particular events. There is a particularly helpful section for archive services wishing to take part in the campaign, with a toolkit and sound advice on good communications practice. The findings of the evaluation of the 2004 campaign were quite encouraging in that:

- Six per cent of the UK population had heard of the Archives Awareness Campaign.
- Two per cent claimed to have attended a campaign event.
- Forty per cent of campaign attendees had never visited an archive before.
- Archive services taking part reported that there was an immediate three percent increase in reader visits during the campaign.
- Forty-five per cent of attendees said that the campaign had inspired them to start researching their family history.

A particular coup for the campaign in 2004, and one which it would be unreasonable to expect every campaign to achieve, was the close link with the BBC TV series *Who Do You Think You Are*, which showed celebrities researching their family history and achieved audiences of around five million.

I will probably be accused of British bias in tentatively venturing the opinion that the model of the Archives Awareness Campaign might be adapted with success in the different cultures and political systems of other countries! However, although successive campaigns in UK have been very effective in introducing the general public to historical archives,

a rather different approach may be needed to get across the importance of records management. Perhaps the establishment of an International Archives Day might encourage fresh thinking about this fundamental issue, in the UK and elsewhere.

## **Samoa National Archives Project Update**

*Correspondents: Ulrike Hertel-Akuino, Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, Samoa, and Emma Murray, Public Record Office Victoria (Australian Business Volunteers Adviser in Samoa, 2005)*

The last year has been a busy time for the National Archives Project in Samoa. While the quest continues to find funding to build a national archives building, some good achievements have been made in other areas in the meantime.

Government has shown its recognition of the importance of this project by approving and filling a new permanent officer position to work exclusively on the project. Two other staff members that work on the project are also responsible for running the Museum of Samoa. Another very important signal has been set in the manifesto of the ruling party during the recent elections, where the preservation of archival records and the availability of an archives building were specifically mentioned.

The draft Public Records Bill is progressing well. It has been through a number of revisions and is currently with the Attorney General's Office for editing. It is hoped that the draft Bill will be ready for stakeholder consultations later in 2006.

Assistance was provided from Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) to the Project through the services of a volunteer archives advisor (Emma Murray) for a six month period. The tasks assigned to Emma included: providing assistance on archives management procedures; helping with the creation of a Code of Best Practice in Records Management for Samoan Government; assisting with the design of an archives building; advising on the storage and preservation of archives; and providing some training.

A records management course was delivered in April 2005 to senior staff working in government records offices, as part of the AusAID/NZAID funded In-Country Training program. The focus of the training was records appraisal and developing retention and disposal schedules. Other topics covered included records disaster planning. The course

participants worked incredibly hard and remarkably managed to develop a first draft of a Common Administrative Records Retention Schedule (CARS) for Samoan Government.

Another important outcome of this course was the establishment of the Records Task Force. The idea to form this task force, which consists of government records management representatives, came from the participants of the in-country training course that was held in September 2003. They perceived there was a need to coordinate efforts to improve records management across the Samoan government, and requested the establishment of a forum where records managers can work together to find government-wide solutions for problems they have in common. The Records Task Force was established with the Public Service Commission's approval in August 2005, and has continued to meet on a monthly basis since then. The National Archives Project coordinates these meetings.

A subcommittee of the newly formed Records Task Force and the staff of the Archives Project, worked together to develop a second draft of the Common Administrative Records Retention Schedule. The schedule has now been endorsed by the Audit Office and will be taken to stakeholder consultation workshops, consisting of senior Government Ministry management, for approval later this year. Should the Public Records Bill become legislation, the schedule will become a standard under it.

There are currently no government-wide recordkeeping guidelines in place in Samoa. In preparation for the passing of records legislation in the country, a draft Code of Best Practice was developed by the Archives Project staff. The Records Task Force provided input and advice to finalise this draft, which is now also ready for senior management consultations. The Code includes guidelines on a number of recordkeeping topics to assist records staff with their work and also to provide them with a mechanism to secure more resources. Topics included a guide for creating and keeping records for all public servants; advice on the management of correspondence, files, electronic records and email; guidelines detailing some requirements for records management systems and records storage rooms; advice on emergency planning; advice on using disposal schedules to sentence records and on the destruction of records and transferring records to the National Archives.

Besides these major outcomes, the Records Task Force also provides the chance to exchange ideas and network in an otherwise quite lonesome

profession. Getting out of the records room and meeting others who face the same issues has been a very positive experience, and encouraged several members to promote positive changes in their area of work. The resourcefulness and dedication of these records managers – many of them working mothers of young children – has been also a great encouragement to the staff of the National Archives Project.

Ulrike Hertel Akuino, the Principal Museum/ Archives Officer, Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, and Emma Murray, the ABV volunteer advisor, were provided with the opportunity to attend the PARBICA 11 Conference in Nadi, Fiji in September 2005 and presented on the Samoan records management training and networking activities. Discussions with archives professionals in the region provided further guidance for the project. The attendance was funded by the Commonwealth Foundation.

The importance of archives institutions in the Pacific having an emergency plan was emphasised at the PARBICA 11 Conference in Nadi. As no such plan existed for the Archives Project and its collections in Samoa, it became a priority activity. There is now a plan ready to be actioned in the event of an emergency. Its recommendations to improve disaster preparedness have already partly been carried out, such as new roofing and blocking the windows in the temporary archives room, and there is now a more organised backup of electronic files. At present, the archives emergency plan is being linked to the general emergency response plan for the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, under which the National Archives Project is operated.

The big task of arrangement and description has commenced on the archives that are stored in the temporary archives' rooms. The largest group of records are government/police files from New Zealand administration and early independence periods (1915 to the 1970s), which had been rescued from unsuitable storage where they had been dumped in an extremely disorderly state. There were a number of activities that needed to be undertaken prior to the sorting of these records, such as identifying the record series, re-boxing records and essentially trying to prevent the archives from any further damage or deterioration. The archives survey report developed back in 1991 by PARBICA proved to be an invaluable resource for identifying the series in this collection of records. The Archives Project staff were astounded at the huge amount of

valuable work carried out in a short space of time to undertake the survey of the archives held in Samoan Government.

Proposals continue to be submitted to various aid programs for further funding for the Archives Project. So far, we are awaiting responses to proposals for funding of the archives building, a microfilming project and records management strengthening. Two beautiful cotton aprons for protection during archival processing were donated by the ABV Advisor (to replace the plastic emergency ponchos received as raffle prizes at PARBICA 11 in Fiji, which turned into a portable sauna in the Samoan climate). We know how much can be done – and should be done – just by using the resources we do have. Additional resources, however, would be very beneficial and would enable us to build upon the good work that has been done so far.