



MEDIA RELEASE

Australian aid watchdog outraged about allegations of AusAID involvement in spying

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Sydney: AID/WATCH has responded to the allegation that Australian government agencies, including AusAID, were involved in spying on the East Timorese cabinet room during sensitive meetings about oil and gas negotiations.

AID/WATCH Director, Thulsi Narayanasamy said, "The allegation that ASIS were able to use the aid program as a ruse for unlawful spying for the purposes of Australia's commercial gain is one of the more appalling cases of aid misuse that has come to light".

The fight for the Greater Sunrise oil and gas field saw Australia ruthlessly fighting for revenue gains over something that according to international law, belonged solely to East Timor.

Woodside Petroleum, which wanted to exploit the field, was allegedly working closely with the Australian government to ensure they were maximising their profits regardless of legality of their tactics.

Ms Narayanasamy said, "the allegation that what allowed the bugging to happen was related to an AusAID program which was overseeing the renovation and construction of the cabinet offices in East Timor is an outrageously deceptive use of aid money earmarked for poverty alleviation.

She continued, "It is deceptive not only to the people of East Timor who were under the impression that they were receiving help, but deceptive also to Australian tax-payers who are proud of the aid program which they believe should serve the poor and disadvantaged."

"Using the guise of aid to facilitate the commercial gain of a private mining company on the backs of people who have been through tremendously difficult times is horrifying."

"That this was done under the Howard government is to an extent unsurprising as aid was used for a myriad of programs that had nothing to do with poverty alleviation. We must take this as a timely warning for what may lay ahead for the aid program under Mr Abbot who openly wants to tie aid with commercial interests."

Ms Narayansamy states, "This ongoing use of Australian aid money to prop up the Extractives Industry, by any means necessary is disgraceful. We saw this continue under a Labor Government through AusAID's Mining for Development Initiative, a blatant example of corporate welfare using the pretence of development as a ruse for private, commercial gain."

"This ongoing facilitation of the interests of the Australian extractives industry using aid money must stop."

AID/WATCH is an independent monitor of Australia's aid and trade.

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