

Australian aid to Indonesia enters death penalty debate

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Aid has made its way into Australia's pleas to Indonesia to spare the lives of Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan, two Australians currently facing the death penalty for drug trafficking.

When speaking to the press on the issue on Wednesday, Prime Minister Tony Abbott [said](#):

"Let's not forget that a few years ago when Indonesia was struck by the Indian Ocean tsunami, Australia sent a billion dollars worth of assistance... We sent a significant contingent of our armed forces to help in Indonesia with humanitarian relief and Australians lost their lives in that campaign to help Indonesia."

"I would say to the Indonesian people and to the Indonesian government, we in Australia are always there to help you and we hope that you might reciprocate in this way at this time."

The comments unleashed [backlash](#) from Indonesia and also [from within Cabinet](#), though Abbott has since [denied](#) that his comments were a threat to cut humanitarian aid.

In response, former AusAID Deputy Director for Asia Richard Moore made an eloquent case for the value of Australian aid to Indonesia in an op-ed published across Fairfax Media on Thursday.

"As a fraction of one per cent of the Indonesian government's budget, the crude weight of our aid is miniscule. But, as John Howard realised after the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, in the right place at the right time it can be very influential and a force for profound good... We need to take care that effect is not created in reverse.... Indonesia's people are the primary beneficiaries of its national development but so are we – a stable, democratic and developing Indonesia is a much better neighbour than an autocratic, stagnant and unstable country. Our "aid" may not buy acquiescence – and as a mature country we should not seek it - but in benefiting Indonesia's development it benefits us."

Read Richard's full article [here](#).

The attention has also sparked conversation on aid to Indonesia more broadly, particularly in the current context of aid cuts -- something that Robin Davies [wrote about on the blog](#) just last week. Robin's analysis on aid to Indonesia was also featured in [The Australian Financial Review](#) (paywalled) and the [The Guardian](#).