



Media Release

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Sister city visit builds New Zealand – Indonesia relationship

A trip by Selwyn residents to our sister city of North Toraja has opened up connections to build a closer relationship between New Zealand and Indonesia.

Nine participants, including Selwyn Mayor Kelvin Coe, farmers, and Sister City Committee Chair Allison Rosanowski visited the North Toraja Regency for a week in August 2016. Trip participants paid for their own travel and accommodation.

The trip was the first sister city exchange between the two areas since a Sister City agreement was signed between North Toraja and Selwyn in 2014. Selwyn is the only New Zealand district to have a sister city in Indonesia. This agreement added to a relationship which had been developing for over a decade between a group of Canterbury farmers, and coffee growers in North Toraja Regency. North Toraja is a Christian area in the highlands of South Sulawesi Province. The New Zealand farmers have been providing support and advice to the North Torajan coffee growers on the production, marketing and selling of their coffee as well as on forming a farming cooperative.

Indonesia has an estimated population of over 260 million people and is the world's fourth most populous country. North Toraja's population is around 215,000.

During the visit, the Selwyn delegation had the opportunity to visit a number of local schools, most of which are run by the Council, speak with the local Council about their role and the challenges they face, and visit the North Toraja area.

"We received a very warm welcome during our visit," says Allison Rosanowski. "The schools were very different to New Zealand schools and were on small, crowded sites. The pressure for places meant some schools operated two sessions a day, six days a week. Teachers taught both sessions. Classes were typically over 30 students and all students wore uniforms. The primary school we visited required students to have five different uniforms which were worn on specific days of the week," she says.

All of the schools visited were interested in forming closer relationships with schools in Selwyn using social media and student or teacher exchanges. In Selwyn, Rolleston College, Rolleston Primary and Clearview School have also indicated they would like to explore a relationship with a school in North Toraja to help their staff and students learn about a different culture.

The delegation also met with a number of organisations involved in the project with North Toraja coffee growers, and visited the coffee growing cooperative established by local farmers which the New Zealand Toraja Rural Development Society has been assisting. The Cooperative now has over 1,700 farmers as members and produces 383 tonnes of coffee – up from 298 tonnes in 2014.

“The group were able to observe coffee plantations in the hills grown under forest canopy trees. The picked red cherries are peeled to produce parchment covered beans which are dried in the sun before the brown parchment is peeled off. The final process before packing for sale is hand grading and quality control,” says Mrs Rosanowski.

The delegation suggested that the cooperative may want to consider sending samples of the coffee to New Zealand as a possible future export market, with support from the New Zealand Toraja Rural Development Society.

One of the objectives of the coffee cooperative project was to provide extra income for households which would allow local girls to attend senior secondary school. In most local schools girls now have a slighter higher enrolment rate than boys.

On planted land, rice is grown in flooded paddies. “Fish live in these paddies. Harvesting and cultivation of the rice is done by hand, often in knee high water,” says Mrs Rosanowski.

Funerals are a distinctive cultural feature in North Toraja. “Bodies are embalmed and kept until the family can afford a funeral which requires the purchase of many buffalo or pigs. The meat is given to funeral guests over several days. Burial takes place in man-made rock holes or separate tombs. Bodies are removed after three years and redressed,” says Mrs Rosanowski.

An invitation for a return sister city visit to Selwyn in November 2016 by North Toraja residents was issued with visits to local schools, farms and facilities discussed.

Ends

Photos attached: Mayor Kelvin Coe presents a picture of a kea to the Bupati (Mayor) of North Toraja and trip participants visit a local school classroom in North Toraja

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