The Australian visit of Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is an opportune moment to reflect on the waning of the Territory’s association with our northern neighbour.

“A decade ago the Northern Territory pursued an active cultural and economic engagement with Indonesia,” says Terry Mills, Leader of the Opposition.

“As befitting our geographical location the Territory led the way on bilateral relations with Indonesia.

“Many Territory schools taught Bahasa and there were bilateral teacher and student exchanges of language and culture.

“There were sporting exchanges that saw Northern Territory high school students compete in an Eastern Provinces competition every two years.

“The Territory Government recognised the potential benefits that would accrue from government to government, business to business and people to people exchanges.

“During the last decade Territory-Indonesian relations have been put on the back burner by the Labor Government.

“It’s time that strategic mistake was corrected and the importance of the Indonesian relationship recognised by the Henderson Government.

“Federal Labor has recognised the importance of improving Australian-Indonesian relations. The then Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Robert McClelland, told the Australian Indonesian Business Council on the 15th of March 2007 – One of the best opportunities for Australian-Indonesian relations is the field of education. Enhancing the linkages of our education sector promises deep social and economic rewards for both nations.

“Should a Mills Government be elected the Indonesian relationship will not be left to languish.

“I will work to develop a coordinated and comprehensive Asian relations strategy with a special emphasis on Indonesia.”