

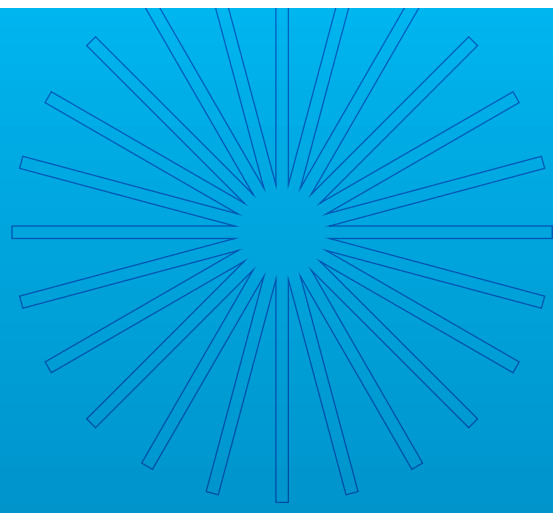


# QONITA ANIS ZHOFIRAH



- 2 COMMITMENTS -





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These storybooks have been lightly edited for clarity.

# Table of Contents

4	Foreword
5	About the WORDS Competition
7	2 Commitments
17	About the Author
18	About AMINEF
19	About the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program and ETA in Indonesia

# Foreword

The seventeen stories presented in this book came from a collaborative process between students and their teachers— both their home institution teacher (co-teacher) and the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) serving in their schools. At the heart of the collaborative process is the desire to foster understanding and to bridge differences. The schools where they taught were selected through a collaborative process between AMINEF, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to host the ETAs. Indeed, everything about this program underlines cooperation between all parties involved.

After a long selection and preparation process, the ETAs served in Indonesia for eight months. They came from various states in the US, from New York to California, Vermont to Louisiana - some from urban areas, others more rural. Together, they represent the rich landscape of places and cultures in America. Likewise, in Indonesia, the ETAs were exposed to and experienced life in various places and cultures. They co-taught English in various areas, spreading from Padang, Jambi, Lampung, Kulon Progo, Kudus, Sidoarjo, Praya, Palangkaraya, Makassar, and Kendari.

Over the eight months the ETAs, co-teachers, and students, in essence, serve as cultural ambassadors to one another. They forged friendships beyond the classroom walls and invested their time and energy in the communities. And this year's theme for the WORDS Storybook competition is indeed "My Community".

The stories you are about to read here were written by the stars of each school. The authors won a local competition organized by the ETAs and the co-teachers. They then worked intensively on their books and on how to best narrate the stories. In April, the students, co-teachers, and ETAs were invited to Jakarta to celebrate their journey – from beginning to learn English to becoming authors and, subsequently, storytellers.

The students performed confidently in front of a panel of four prominent judges who are all Fulbrighters from Indonesia and the US: Ahmad Fuadi, an author of best-selling novels including "Negeri 5 Menara" and a prominent public speaker; Anna Grundström, a performing artist and independent researcher based in Brooklyn, New York; Azalia Muchransyah, filmmaker, scholar, and lecturer at BINUS University; and Douglas Ramage, AMINEF Board Member and founding Managing Director of Bower-GroupAsia Indonesia.

The third place went to Clarintha Glory Amungin Allokendek from SMK Raden Umar Said Kudus with "Hannah The One-Man Team" whose story reminded us of the importance of collaboration with others. Putri Permata Sari from SMK 9 Padang's story "The Pursuit of Happiness", won second place. It is a beautiful story about self-acceptance and creating a community of your own.

In first place was Florencia Kirana Wilman from SMK 6 Padang, with her story "The Day Coffee Called Us Home." Ms. Wilman presented a powerful reminder that, amid disasters and challenges, communities can work together and find solutions. Her story showed that sometimes what the community needs is one person to plow the way, helping each other, and others will follow.

The WORDS Competition is a celebration for all: the students, the ETAs, and the co-teachers. It is a celebration of a new, and hopefully lasting, connection among people. And AMINEF is proud to have been part of these connections.

**Dr. Sandra Hamid**

Executive Director, AMINEF

# About the WORDS Competition

**WORDS** is a national English-language competition that brings together one student from each Fulbright ETA host school. Launched as a speech and talent contest in 2007, it evolved into a storytelling and storybook competition in 2018.

Finalists first win their school-level competition, which Fulbright ETAs organize in collaboration with the co-teachers. ETAs support students through brainstorming sessions, workshops, and performance feedback.

A highlight of the AMINEF year, the WORDS Competition allows 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders to showcase their storytelling skills, English proficiency, and cultural insights. In 2026, seventeen finalists will bring the theme **“My Community”** to life through their original stories.





“Uh.. Which one should I choose? English Club is the club I want to join, but the Scouts Club is where all my friends are...you know what? I’ll just pick both! I mean, how hard could it possibly be?”

Sophia ended up choosing two extracurricular activities, like Sophia said: “How hard could it really be?” Well, it wasn’t, until...



Until their schedules clashed. English Club announced a storytelling competition that was an opportunity to represent the school, something Sophia had always dreamed of. Then Sophia realized something, it was held on the exact same day as the camping event that the Scouts Club had announced a few days ago.



Sophia's friend asked her during Scouts practice,  
"Hey Soph, I don't see your name on the list.  
You're still coming right? We've been practicing for weeks."

Sophia hesitated. "I... I uhm.. Yeah! Of course,  
you'll see me there, alright!"



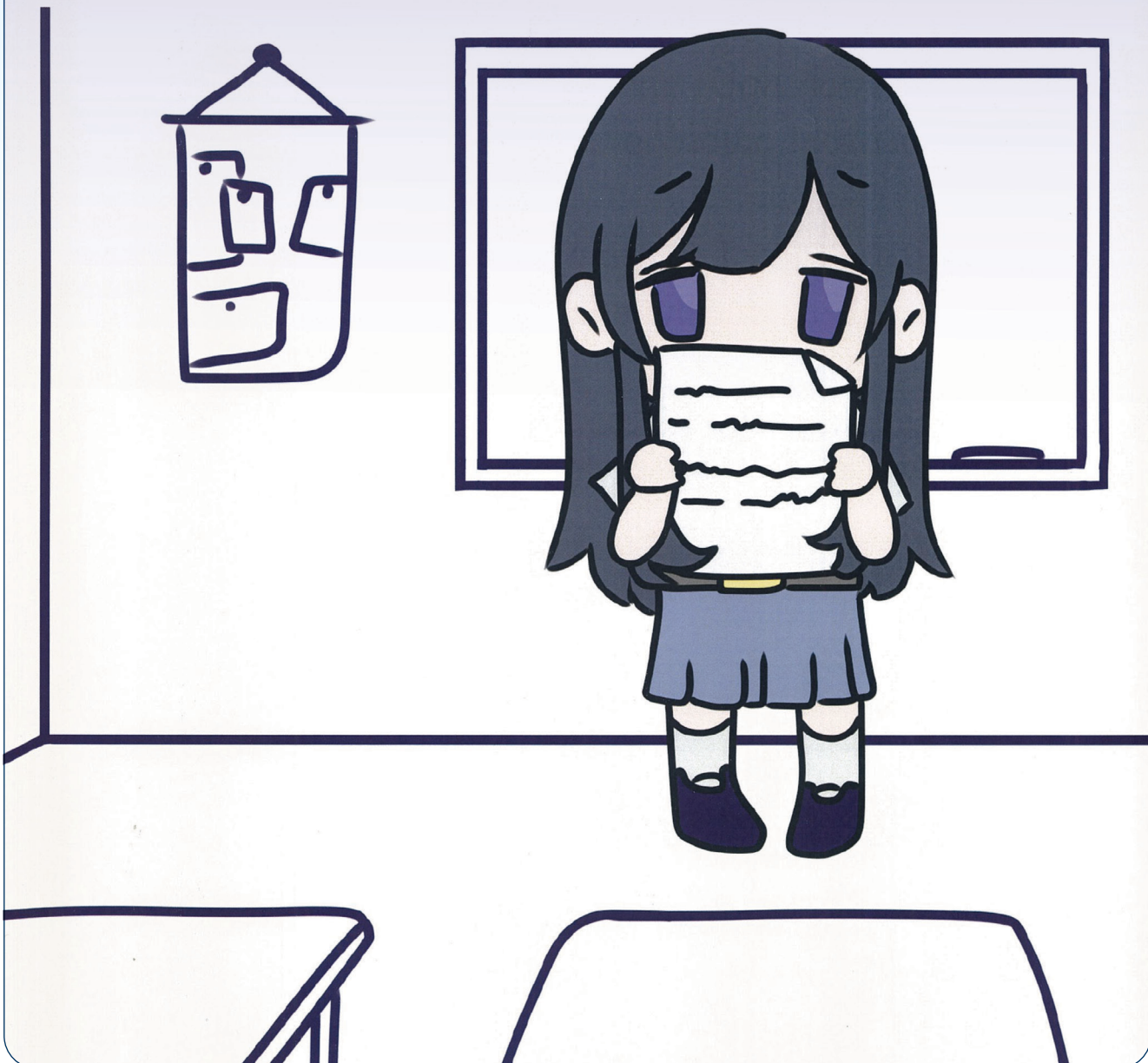
That night, Sophia stared at the ceiling sleeplessly.  
She had to choose between two communities she loved.  
One helped her grow into who she wanted to be,  
and the other reminded her of who she already was.



The next day, Sophia rushed from a Scouts meeting to the English Club room to practice quickly. Sophia grabbed her story sheet and began to read her story.

“The little rabbit was looking for his mother...uh wait no her... while he was looking for her mother...Ugh no! What’s going on? Why am I so nervous? If I keep on going like this...”

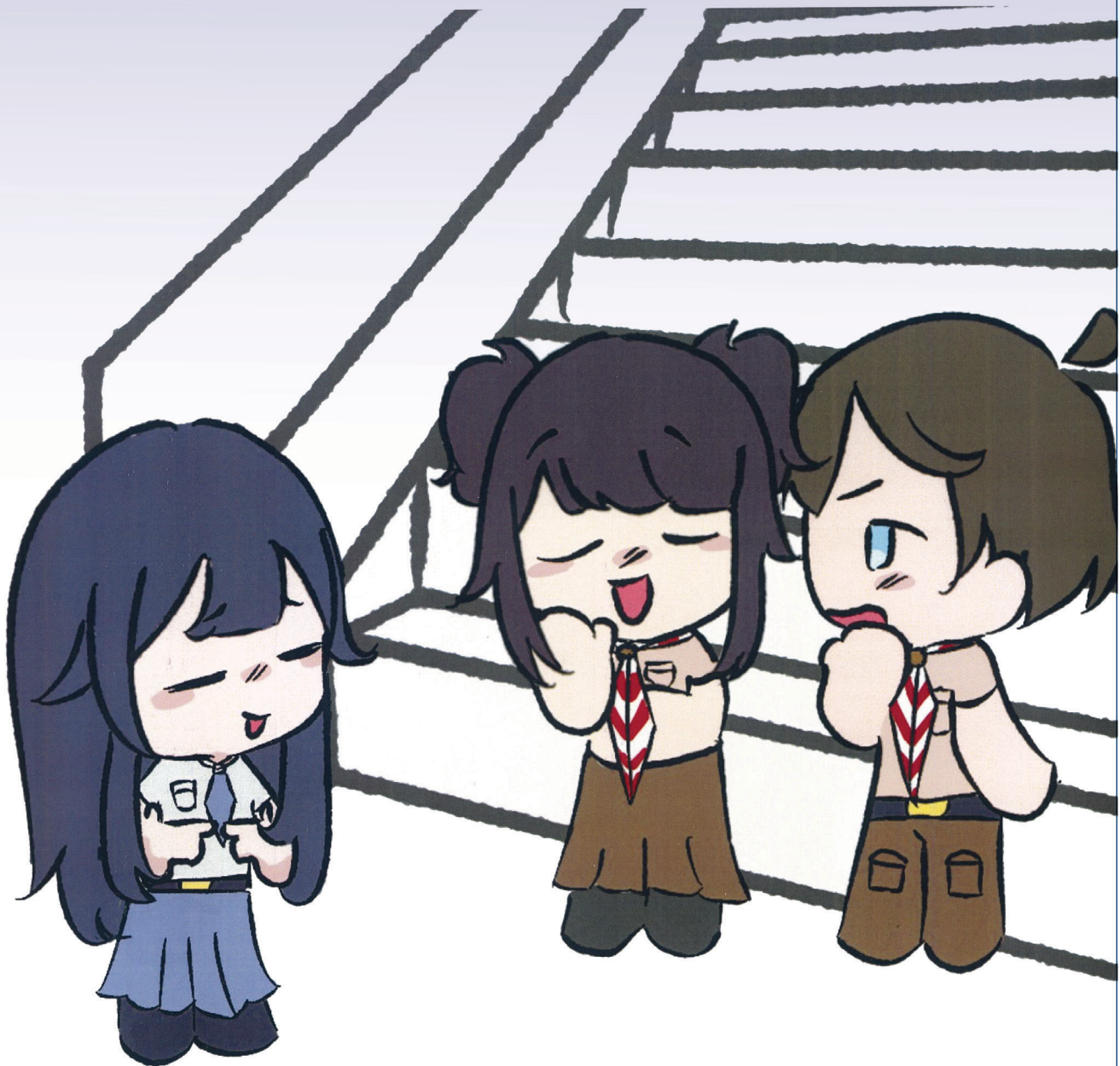
“Oh no... if I end up losing even after I chose this competition over the camping event, everyone will be so disappointed in me,” she whispered to herself.



Sophia knew she had to choose one or the other, so the next day at Scouts practice, Sophia walked up to her friends.

“Guys, I have to tell you something important.”  
She nervously said to her friends.

“Of course, Soph, what is it?” Sophia took a deep breath...



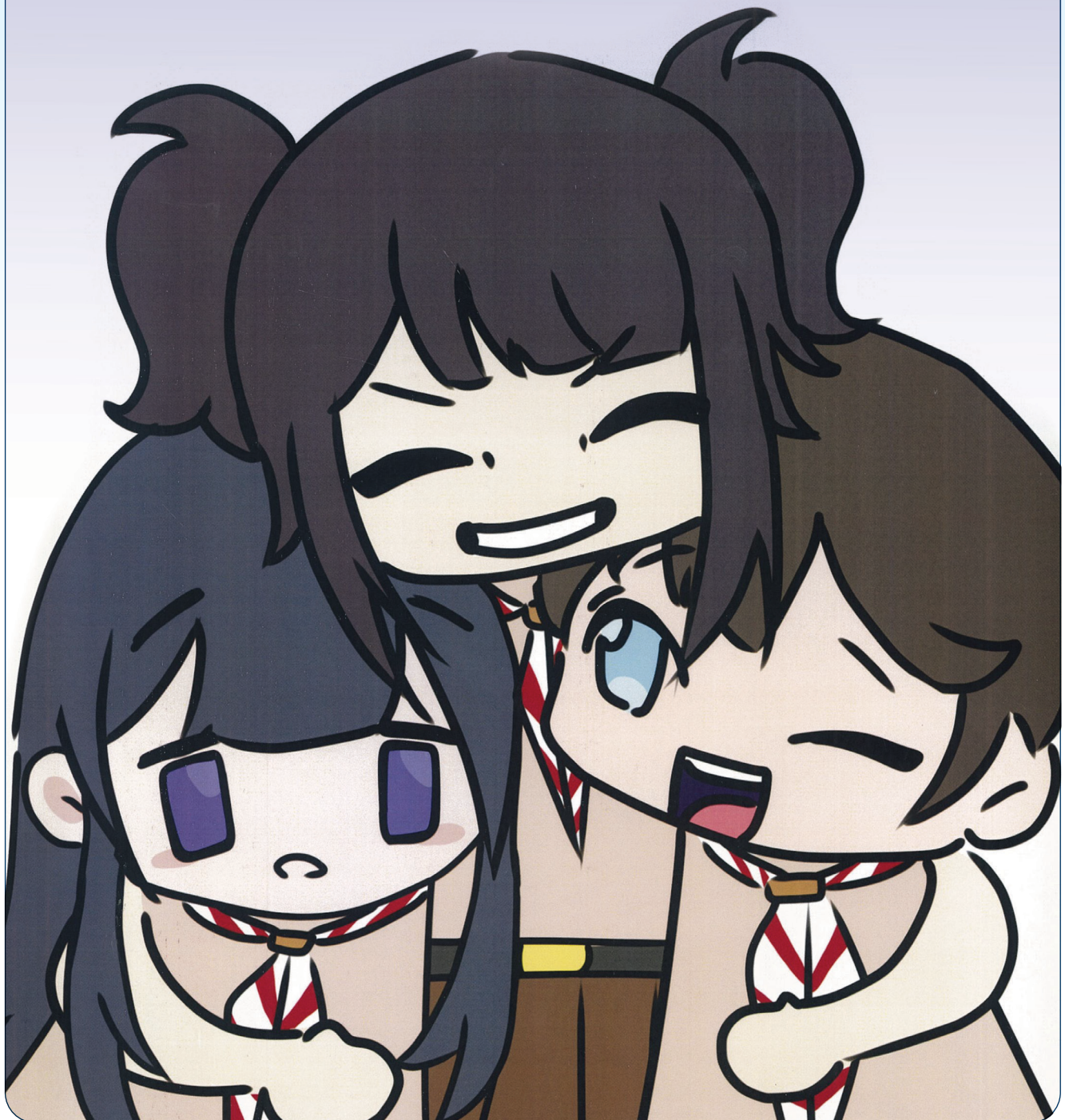
“I can’t participate in the camping event because..  
I want to join the storytelling competition.”

Sophia expected to be judged, but to her surprise,  
Sophia’s friends didn’t act that way.



“Soph, did you think we would be upset? You should have told us sooner, and we support you no matter what.”

And in that moment, Sophia finally realized something important: community doesn't limit you. It lifts you up, wherever you choose to go.





# About the Author

**Qonita Anis Zhofirah**  
SMAN 2 Palangkaraya



My name is Qonita Anis Zhofirah. I was born in Palangkaraya on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2011, I am now 15. I have a lot of hobbies such as drawing, playing games, hanging out with friends and watching figure skating in my free time. I am in the tenth grade at SMAN 2 Palangkaraya. I'm hoping to make lots of new friends at the WORDS Competition!

# About AMINEF

**The American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF)** is the binational Fulbright Commission for Indonesia. AMINEF's many educational exchange programs have increased mutual understanding between the United States and Indonesia and strengthened the ties that unite our two countries.

Since 1952, more than 3,500 Indonesians and 1,400 Americans have participated in exchanges. Annually, 80-100 Indonesians travel to the US through Fulbright grants for degree study, teaching, research, or non-degree professional fellowships. Similarly, up to 60 Americans receive Fulbright support to contribute their expertise in teaching, research, or as Specialists, offering insights to Indonesian institutions.

For detailed information on degree scholarships and non-degree fellowships available to Indonesians and Americans, visit the AMINEF website at [www.aminef.or.id](http://www.aminef.or.id).

# About the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program and ETA in Indonesia

**The Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program**, one of the US State Department-funded Fulbright programs in many countries worldwide, places recent college graduates and young professionals as English teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools or universities overseas.

The program helps improve international students' English-language abilities and knowledge of the US while increasing the US student's language skills and knowledge of the many host countries worldwide.

In Indonesia, the Fulbright ETAs are placed in high schools (SMA, SMK, and Madrasah) that assist local English teachers. The program has been running for over two decades, since 2004, affecting thousands of Indonesian students and their communities across the archipelago. AMINEF works closely with the Indonesian Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education and Religious Affairs to administer the Fulbright ETA program in Indonesia.






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