



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS

**BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE**

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO

**AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE BALI
DEMOCRACY FORUM**

**“Building and Consolidating Democracy: A strategic Agenda
for Asia”**

NUSA DUA, BALI

10-11 DECEMBER 2008

Your Excellency, President of the Republic of Indonesia
Your Excellency, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government
Distinguished Members of Delegations
Ladies and Gentlemen

First, please allow me to thank the Government of Indonesia and in particular our host, His Excellency Dr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, for the warm welcome we have received and for this forum's excellent organisation.

I would also like to express my profound appreciation to be able to take part in this important initiative. This Democracy Forum is at this moment more than timely to the Asian region, it is also a strategic opportunity in respect to the new international circumstances that we face.

Today's globalised world pays little heed to individual and regional borders, transforming internal problems into problems common to all countries. And today we live in a situation of multi-dimensional threats, which include those posed by the recent economic and financial crisis as well as the food and energy crisis. The impact of these threats on poor and vulnerable countries, such as Timor-Leste, is still unpredictable.

Terrorism has of course also emerged as a significant threat of our time, becoming a scourge against the values of the rule of law, democracy and freedom – the cornerstone of our societies - and affecting the international order.

A recent example were the terrible attacks in Mumbai which deserve more from us than merely expressions of solidarity and condolences to the victim's families and to the Government and the People of India.

It is also crucial that we fight against this unexpected enemy and that we create a common regional and international cooperation platform, in order to protect innocent victims.

This terrorist act represents an attack on the largest democracy in the world and shows how much this system, historical and based on the noblest ideals of humankind, can be vulnerable against the arrogance of man.

The Asian continent, including Timor-Leste, has been the stage of recent internal disputes, resulting from ethnic and religious tensions or caused by political, military, social and cultural factors, showing how vulnerable States can be when anti-democratic feelings persist within them; when men pursue individual interests against the collective interests of a People.

The fight against terrorism and internal disputes - which devastate democratic aspirations and deteriorate economical, social and humanitarian conditions, as well as the architecture of regional security - is both a moral imperative and an essential condition for development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste, the youngest democracy and one of the poorest countries in South-East Asia, cannot be isolated from its regional partners, but must instead seek strong partnerships to overcome today's challenges, the challenges of a globalised world.

The people of Timor-Leste have earned their place in the history of democracy, through their selfless fight for national sovereignty and independence, based on the popular will and in the respect for the dignity of the human person.

Last year the People once again gave evidence of their collective democratic awareness, when in the most unlikely of times – after a crisis that shook our Institutions deeply and caused great human and material losses – the People elected first the President of the Republic and then their representatives in the National Parliament.

Still, consolidating a Democracy is no easy task. It is not enough to call ourselves the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, to have political parties and to promote free and regular elections; we must also work hard to give meaning and a practical effect to this ideal, so that it may be embedded in our Institutions and in the daily life of our People.

The true challenge has only just begun. Freedom, in democracy, has a broader meaning than acting without oppression. Releasing people from poverty, hunger, sickness and ignorance is not achieved overnight, and it takes more than simply setting rules that regulate individual and collective rights and duties.

The Timorese People have trusted in democracy, and now expect this to also represent good government, economic progress and justice – and this is more than merely equal political rights. Our People seek an effective State, with democratic and stable political institutions, able to unite the Timorese and respond to the plurality of their interests.

We have adopted as immediate priorities the consolidation of national security and stability, together with social justice measures for the poorest and most vulnerable, as well as urgent State management reforms.

We have been studying the public sector reform in Indonesia and my Government is also determined to create an effective, independent and corruption-free civil service, relying on collaboration by all Sovereign Bodies –

so that the transformation of the public sector leads to a governance of transparency, accountability and efficiency in the management of public finance and in the delivery of essential services to communities.

After achieving national Peace and implementing new administrative, financial, legal and institutional systems, we are now ready to start our economic development policy.

Timor-Leste is a country blessed with natural resources that, if used wisely, may free the Timorese from poverty. To achieve this, our medium term strategic agenda seeks to:

- Develop national infrastructure;
- Develop human capital; and
- Develop agriculture and rural areas.

This economic growth policy will enable the creation of employment, increase revenue, reduce dependence on essential commodities from abroad and, of course, gradually improve the living conditions of the population.

These are vital factors for supporting the strengthening of the democratic system. We know that without peace and social and economic stability – without responding to the needs of our People and satisfying their social aspirations - it is difficult to consolidate democratic values and principles.

Your Excellencies,

This is not an agenda, political and economic, exclusive to Timor-Leste, but a strategic agenda common to all countries in Asia.

Strengthening the quality of democracies is strengthening the States. It demands commitment and the spirit of institutional cooperation of all organs of sovereignty and the active participation of civil society in the decisions that affect all citizens.

The challenges faced by the young democracy of Timor-Leste - which every second year has found itself regressing and in conflict situations, culminating with the attacks against the Head of State and Head of the Government on February 11 this year - showed us the fragility of the process of consolidating democracy and obligated us to review our national policies.

This fragility is not unique to my country. The experience of other Asian States also shows that democracy can be easily subjugated to acts of violence and repression. We must, with solidarity between our nations, reinforce our mechanisms of dialogue and our mutual support to walk the path of building and consolidating democracy in Asia.

We represent here different cultures, different political options and different states of economic and social development. However, this diversity provides an excellent opportunity to learn lessons, share best practises and, especially, explore approaches to overcoming common challenges, in consideration of democratic principles and values.

We cannot borrow success formulas from other countries, but we can create innovating regional cooperation partnerships, learning from our various experiences and assuming with responsibility a commitment of regional development.

Democracy is first and foremost an issue of responsibility!

We must strengthen our regional alliances based on shared and lasting responsibilities, and we assume right from this moment the commitment to contribute to this goal.

Bringing democracy to the forefront and promoting a dialogue that leads to new partnerships and cooperation mechanisms means believing that the destiny of humankind is to achieve peace and sustainable development.

In concluding, I would like to express final words of appreciation to our closest neighbour, Indonesia, which provides a remarkable example of a transition process from an autocratic governance towards a pluralistic democracy and an open and tolerant society.

The democratic vision and the leadership of their President have enabled the Indonesian people to enjoy a climate of peace, freedom and development, promoting “unity in diversity”. It is not by chance that this forum is being held here, and it is also not by chance that Timor-Leste immediately agreed to take part in this meeting, which seeks to promote a true democratic culture in our region.

This is the spirit of young democracies, and our common destiny.

Thank you very much!

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão

10 December 2008