



SPEECH

BY

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**INAUGURATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION'S TIMOR-LESTE
NATIONAL COMMISSION – CULTURAL PERFORMANCE AND
RECEPTION**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dili

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Your Excellency, Dr Atul Khare, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Timor-Leste

Dr. Hubert Gijzen, Director of UNESCO Jakarta and Regional Bureau of Science for Asia and Pacific and representative to Timor-Leste

Ms. Eloisa Ramirez, Assistant Director Philippines UNESCO National Commission

Her Excellency, Kirsty Sword Gusmão, Goodwill Ambassador for Education and Chairperson of the National Commission of UNESCO, Timor-Leste

Members of the National Commission of UNESCO, Timor-Leste

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to host this Cultural Performance and Reception to celebrate the inauguration of UNESCO's National Commission in Timor-Leste.

The goals of UNESCO reflect the goals of our nation, and so the inauguration today of the UNESCO National Commission in Timor-Leste is a significant event in the development of our country. And it is one we will celebrate tonight with performances which will highlight the importance of our cultural heritage to our people.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I have a strong personal connection to UNESCO after the organization awarded me with the UNESCO Felix Houphouet Boigny Peace Prize in Paris in 2003.

This was a great honour and receiving the award conferred, in my view, a moral obligation to establish the Xanana Gusmão Foundation to contribute, at least in a modest way, to the intellectual and professional development of Timorese girls and boys who demonstrated merit and ability, many of whom lack the support and resources needed to develop their potential.

UNESCO promotes international co-operation among the nations of the world in the areas of education, science, culture and communication.

In this task, it works to promote dialogue based on respect for the values and the dignity of each culture. Its goal is ultimately to bring peace to the minds of the people of the world.

While UNESCO has ambitious goals, they are nevertheless goals shared with Timor-Leste as part of the international community.

A process of dialogue based on respect and the dignity of the individual has been a foundation for the progress of our nation. The history of our country has been one of struggle as well as loss and through dialogue and respect we have been able to work together towards a better future for our people.

And in working towards this future we are focused on providing education to our children and promoting our cultural heritage.

When in Paris I asked the Director-General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, to assist us with the preservation of our cultural heritage that we were at risk of losing. However, I was told that UNESCO was not in a position to help protect “intangible” cultural heritage, as opposed to material objects, and that there were no international conventions that would provide the foundation for this kind of assistance.

Following these discussions, I invited the Director-General to visit Timor-Leste, which he did in July 2003, and on this occasion I again reinforced the request which I will again make tonight.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The inauguration today of the UNESCO National Commission in Timor-Leste is a significant event for our country.

The National Commission which Timor-Leste has set up will operate as a cooperating body with UNESCO. The members of the Commission represent civil society, religious denominations, Government and the National Parliament.

And we will also be linking UNESCO to Government Ministries, who have responsibilities for education, science and culture, in order to reinforce Government action in these areas.

In this way, we will ensure that there is wide ranging and effective communication between governmental as well as non-governmental bodies with the work of UNESCO – to allow us to work together to further our shared goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen

An important role for the National Commission will be promoting and enhancing our culture and our heritage.

Our culture is fundamental to our national identity and the strengthening of our unity and our national cohesion. And it is important that this culture is both safeguarded and celebrated.

In this respect, I would like to mention today that we have been approached by the Dean of the Australian Institute of Music, Dr Raffaele Marcellino, who is proposing a project to preserve Timor-Leste's extraordinary musical and linguistic heritage. The Australian Institute of Music is seeking to work with the Government of Timor-Leste to establish a National Sound and Music Archive.

In addition to this, other Development Partners have also expressed interest to assist us with the preserving and enhancing our musical culture.

This willingness to support us in our goal - from UNESCO, the Australian Institute of Music and other Development Partners – provides the National Commission with a great opportunity to grasp this support to help preserve our cultural heritage.

Tonight we have the opportunity to witness an important aspect of our uniquely Timorese culture - our traditional song and dance.

Song and dance has an important position in Timorese society and in the shared experience and history of our communities. It plays a central role in our expressions of meaning as well as in our healing and of course in our celebrations.

And we take pride in the musical expressions of our people, including importantly that of our young people.

As well as the music and dance performances tonight, I would also encourage you all to attend the other events and activities during the Cultural Festival. These events will showcase our cultural heritage, expressing our shared values and the richness of our people.

I now ask you to relax and enjoy the cultural performances which reflect the heart and the soul of our homeland.

Thank you very much.