



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

**SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST
MEETING ON THE LANGUAGES OF TIMOR-LESTE**

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dili
5 August 2010**

Your Excellency the Dean of the UNTL, Professor Benjamim Corte-Real

Your Excellency the Head of the UNESCO National Commission in Timor-Leste, Head of the National Education Commission and Head of the Meeting's Organization Commission, Mrs Kirsty Sword Gusmão

Your Excellency the Secretary of State for Culture, Mr Virgílio Smith

Members of the Meeting's Organization Commission

Illustrious Guests

Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I take part in this First Meeting on the Languages of Timor-Leste, having been given the honour to kick-off this timely exchange of ideas on the social, cultural and educational roles that the Languages of Timor-Leste, including Tetum, play in terms of building and strengthening national identity and unity.

Thus it is with great personal satisfaction that I see how the synergies between the parties involved in organizing this meeting have been so productive, giving voice to a debate that is both necessary and current.

To all those who took part in organizing this meeting, namely the UNESCO National Commission in Timor-Leste, the National Linguistic Institute, the Timor Lorosa'e Nippon Cultural Centre and the Secretariat of State for Culture, I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart!

I would also like to seize this opportunity to congratulate His Excellency the President of the Republic, His Excellency the Minister of Education and Her Excellency the Goodwill Ambassador for Education on the creation and start of the original "Writing competition in the languages of Timor-Leste", with the noble goal of promoting literary production in the national language, thereby valorising our ethnolinguistic diversity. Thus I urge all

communities to have an active participation in this pioneering initiative, so that we may all express our cultural legacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste is a young Nation that is still being built and where there is still much to do, particularly in the so-called key sectors. The goals of this Meeting are a clear reflection of the purposes and challenges of our nation in terms of education, and I am sure that the resulting exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences will be a significant stepping stone towards the development of our Country's education and cultural system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Timor-Leste there are "Many Languages, One People!"

In Tetum we say "Dalen Oi-Oin, Povu Ida Deit!"

In Mambae we say "Gase ahe ahe, atu gal id!"

In Kemak we say "Dale abe abe, atamasa sia!"

In Fataluku we say "Luku-lukun ze zene, marlauana ukani!"

In Baikenu we say "Lasi huma huma, tob mése!"

In Makasae we say "Sobu bau-baun, anu unai!"

The at least 16 languages that coexist in Timor-Leste translate clearly the complexity of the linguistic atmosphere we have in our Country, and are right from the start a key part of our cultural legacy.

Each of these national languages corresponds to the daily communication needs of those who speak them, and it is through them that reality is firstly understood, conceptualized and described.

It is precisely in the light of this ethnolinguistic diversity, and in order to promote more inclusive education and to safeguard against the discrimination of those who speak them, that the very Constitution of Timor-Leste sets that the national languages, including Tetum, are to be valorised and developed by the State, at the same time they are protected internationally by organizations such as UNESCO.

Language is undeniably one of the cornerstones for the progress of any nation. And Tetum, being the most used language in all the land, has been one of the most important factors of national cohesion throughout our history. It has also been gradually developed, so as to meet all formal and informal communication needs.

Thus I would like to seize this opportunity to praise the contributions of the many national and international linguists (some of whom are here today) in the development of Tetum and in its socialization, along with Portuguese, as education language par excellence.

Today we are focusing on the current need to promote broader public knowledge on the role of Timorese languages, simultaneously in the social, cultural and educational aspects, thereby enabling them to be conveniently used in the strengthening of national unity and cohesion.

If on one hand it is imperative to protect and valorise the languages of Timor-Leste as a unique feature of our cultural legacy, on the other we must also determine the ways in which they can be used to assist the intellectual development of our children and youngsters, so that education may reach every Timorese girl and boy!

These two days will be days of reflection, discussion and exchange of ideas. I am very proud to look around me and see such distinguished personalities gathered around the Timorese linguistic diversity.

And I am certain that the contributions by the Linguistic, education and culture experts, including the representatives in attendance from the various linguistic groups, will make this first meeting a success!

Thank you very much!

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão

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