



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT THE OFFICIAL RECEPTION
IN HONOUR OF THE AWARDING OF THE
ORDER OF VANUATU FIRST CLASS MEDAL
FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF THE HIGHEST SERVICE
TO VANUATU AND HUMANITY AT LARGE

Port Vila, Vanuatu

12 September 2011

Excellency, Mr. Iolu Johnson Abbil Kaniapnin, President of the Republic

Excellency, Hon. Meltek Sato Kilman Livtuvanu, Prime Minister

Excellency, Hon. Dunstan Hilton, Speaker of Parliament

Dear Members of the Government and Parliament

Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

It is truly a great privilege to be here tonight at this reception hosted by the Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, with the presence of the President of the Republic and Speaker of Parliament.

On my arrival here on Saturday, I was deeply honoured to be received by the traditional chiefs and leaders and the veterans of the Vanuatu Liberation movement in a moving ceremony enriched in culture and history.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Vanuatu Government for the warm hospitality that they have shown to me and my delegation. It has been truly a wonderful visit so far.

Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge and pay tribute to all the great veterans of the Liberation movement, in particular,

- **The Late Chief Tinabuamata**
- **The Late Moli Jimmy Stevens, Leader of the Nagriamel Movement**
- **The Late Dr. Fr. Walter Lini, the first Prime Minister of Vanuatu**
- **The Late Aiden Arugogona**
- **Mr. Peter Taurakoto**
- **Ambassador Donald Kalpokas**
- **Fr. John Bani, first President of the National Party**
- **Barak Sope, Secretary-General of the Movement**
- **Kalkot Mataskelekele**
- **The Late John Naupa**
- **The Late Rev. Fred Timakata, Prominent Chief and Church leader in the movement**
- **Ati George Sokomanu, Host of the Liberation Movement; and**
- **Hilda Lini, my sister and the Coordinator of the Women's Wing of the Movement**

for their contribution not only to Vanuatu but to the causes of freedom around the world, including Timor-Leste.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are both island nations in the Asia-Pacific.

While Vanuatu may consist of many, many more islands than Timor-Leste, we share much in common.

Importantly, we share common values. These include a respect for human rights, political solidarity, self-determination and democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have just come from the Pacific Islands Forum in Auckland.

This Forum was a great opportunity for the nations of the Pacific to affirm our collective spirit and our friendship as well as to learn from each other.

As small developing nations we also face great challenges.

We must continue to pursue development, the building of strong economies to provide jobs and opportunity, and the improvement in the health, education and welfare of our people.

We must do this in an international environment that makes our task more difficult.

We must face many threats, including from transnational crime, climate change and international conflict.

And we are not immune from the turmoil in the world economy and the effect it has on our nations, including on the price of food, on the value of our exports and on our access to affordable capital.

In Timor-Leste, this reminds us of our vulnerability and of our fragility.

Despite our fragility, we are engaging in the process of State building and peace building.

The process of State building is one that Vanuatu has already undertaken. And we can learn from you.

We can also learn from fragile States around the globe.

This is why Timor-Leste, along with 16 other nations that represent 350 million people, have joined together to form the g7+ group of fragile and conflict affected nations.

This group, which consists of **Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Afghanistan, Guinea Bissau, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Central African Republic, Nepal, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Somalia, South Sudan, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste as the Chair**, allows us to speak with one voice.

And it provides an opportunity for our countries to re-acquire ownership of the development program and promote genuine aid effectiveness.

It allows us to ensure that international aid does not weaken our self-determination.

Our membership of the g7+ group is one of Timor-Leste's flag ship contributions to the community of nations.

It is our way of showing solidarity with the people, and nations, of the world that are trying to emerge from conflict and achieve peace and stability.

With our participation in the g7+ we have learnt from your nation.

Just as Vanuatu supported our people in the struggle for independence, we want to help other nations in their peace building and State building endeavour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During our struggle for independence, there were times of darkness.

While our motto was ‘to resist is to win’, people throughout our nation, from our tropical beaches to our mountain ranges, came under sustained attack. They suffered greatly.

At these times our struggle seemed more hopeless because we appeared to be forsaken by much of the international community.

At these times, when we could count on few friends, Vanuatu stood with us.

The good people of Vanuatu supported our struggle in the international community – and to their cost.

We will never, never forget this.

While I am so pleased to be able to thank you for your historical support for our independence, this support is but an example of the values of your nation.

As a nation, Vanuatu should be proud of its principles. These principles include support for self-determination, justice and human rights, compassion for the vulnerable and solidarity with the oppressed.

In this way, Vanuatu makes a profound contribution to peace and humanity in our region.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to receive the Order of Vanuatu, First Class Medal.

I accept, on behalf of the courageous people of Timor-Leste, this award with profound appreciation, but also with humility.

It was the Timorese people who never gave up in their struggle, and who suffered greatly to achieve freedom, to achieve liberation and to achieve independence.

This award provides international recognition to the exceptional bravery and great sacrifices of the Timorese people.

Yesterday, during mass at the Cathedral, Bishop Jean Bosco Baremes spoke about forgiveness and this award acknowledges the willingness of our people to forgive and their desire for reconciliation.

This desire is what has driven our relationship with the Republic of Indonesia. On 20th August this year, we held a special demobilisation ceremony for our veterans (former guerrillas) and I cannot forget to mention that my dear sister Hilda Lini was present to witness this unique event. At this ceremony, the ex-Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces and later the Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia, retired General Tri Sutrisno, together with the Indonesian Defence Minister and official generals, all paid homage to the Timorese veterans. Their presence at this poignant moment in our history was a concrete sign of just how far our reconciliation process has come.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of Timor-Leste, I thank the people of Vanuatu for their support of our cause and for their recognition of our struggle.

For in truth, this award is for them too.

I say again: At the darkest and most difficult of times, when we were alone and could count on few friends, Vanuatu stood with us. This unfailing support was evident again when in 2000 and in the years following, you sent your police officers to help us restore peace. We know this came at your own cost and we are truly humbled by this. This is genuine solidarity! I know you are proud of this and we are deeply moved by your generosity!

Timor-Leste will never forget this support and this is my message here today.

We thank Vanuatu for the support that helped to make our dream of freedom come true.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend Vanuatu for conferring these awards.

In doing so, Vanuatu looks beyond its beautiful islands to make a contribution to the community of nations, and to humanity.

In a world of growing materialism, these awards remind us of our better side.

They remind us that real achievement should be measured by the contribution we make to our fellow brothers and sisters.

And so, Vanuatu should be commended for recognising international contributions to humanity. Next January, my President of the Republic and a very good and dear friend of Vanuatu, His Excellency, Dr. José Ramos-Horta will come here to confer a posthumous award to the late Dr. Fr. Walter Lini. The award will be the highest order of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, the Order of Merit *Laran Luak* (*Big Heart*) and will be given in honour and recognition of Dr. Fr. Walter Lini's tireless contribution to the freedom movement of Vanuatu and to the cause of humanity worldwide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to end by saying a few words in Bislama:

Tank yu tumas. Mo papa God bai i blesem yufela evriwan!

12 September 2011

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão