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## **Health sector in Timor-Leste set for massive capacity boost as over 400 Timorese Doctors graduate**

Last week was a special week for celebrations in Timor-Leste. Amongst the bigger celebrations of the Day of the Proclamation of Independence and the Anniversary of the Revolt of Manufahi, was a celebration that took place at the Dili Convention Centre on Monday the 26<sup>th</sup> of November as over 400 Timorese students graduated as Medical Doctors.

Each of these students has successfully completed their final exams after four years of study in Cuba and two years of study at the University of Timor-Leste. They now join the 80 doctors, now practicing, that graduated in 2010/2011. An additional 90 students will re-sit their final exams in April of 2013 and at the end of 2013 another 250 students will be sitting final exams at the end of their six years of study. By the year 2016 it is anticipated that there will be over 1,000 Timorese medical graduates practicing as fully qualified doctors in Timor-Leste.

This truly remarkable outcome for Timor-Leste, in only ten years after the restoration of independence, has been achieved with the support, investment and cooperation of Cuba. Attending the ceremony to address the students Prime Minister, His Excellency Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão asked Cuba's Ambassador to Timor-Leste to convey to the Cuban Commandant, President, Government and People both his own personal gratitude and the gratitude of all Timorese. The Prime Minister said

*"I cannot forget to mention to you how grateful we are for Cuba having generously accepted these hundreds of young people, enriching them with knowledge and technical training to allow them to perform their obligations to their people, in the area of medicine."*



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In his address Cuban Ambassador, His Excellency Luis Julián Laffitte Rodríguez, recalled the meeting in February of 2003 when Mr. Xanana Gusmão, Dr. Jose Ramos- Horta and Dr. Mari Alkatiri met briefly with the Commander in Chief Fidel Castro in Malaysia.

He noted that in this moment *“was born Cuban aid to Timor-Leste; which was materialized by sending a brigade of health professionals who would provide medical assistance, the granting of scholarships to young Timorese to study medicine in Cuba and technical assistance to eliminate illiteracy in Timor-Leste.”*

Prior to this graduation last week Timor-Leste had 13 medical specialist doctors, 139 doctors in general practice, 1,271 nurses and assistant nurses, 427 midwives and 416 health technicians.

Addressing the students, the Prime Minister was frank in describing the challenges before them, which he described as the image of Timor-Leste with 10 years of independence. He went on to outline the plans to address these challenges within the framework of the Strategic Development Plan and in the five-year Program of the Fifth Constitutional Government.

The Prime Minister explained *“we will continue to invest heavily in human resources development until we achieve the objective of having at least one doctor, two nurses, two midwives and one laboratory technician in each Suco of the Country (with at least 2,000 habitants).”*

On behalf of Cuba the Ambassador advised the graduates *“Surely now, you will face great challenges and needs in the country districts and sucos where you will be located. You should be good doctors, very human with your patients and especially make every effort to save all life as much as possible.”*

Prime Minister Gusmão summed up the significance of the moment:

*“The graduation of so many sons and daughters of this land, in the health sector that is so essential for our people, is reason for great jubilation and renewed hope for the future.”***ENDS**



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