



**P R I M E
M I N I S T E R**

**SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING SESSION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
“MEMORY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY”**

**ORGANISED BY THE
TIMORESE RESISTANCE ARCHIVE AND MUSEUM**

**MFAC Ceremonial Hall
26 January 2015**



Palácio do Governo,
Avenida Presidente Nicolau Lobato,
Dili, Timor-Leste

Your Excellencies

Dr Mari Alkatiri, President of the Authority for the Special Administrative Region of Oe-Cusse Ambeno and former Prime-Minister

Mr José Luís Guterres, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Mr Abílio Araújo

Your Excellencies

The Vice-Chancellors and members of the Academic Community

Your Excellency Father Felgueiras

Your Excellencies

The Ambassadors and Representatives from International Agencies

Your Excellencies

The Representatives from national and international civic organizations

Members of the Military and of the Police

Distinguished Director of the Timorese Resistance Archive and Museum

Distinguished speakers and national and international guests

Distinguished members of Parliament

Fellow Government members

Young students

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be invited to open this International Conference on Memory and National Identity.

Once again, the Timorese Resistance Archive and Museum is holding an important event that will enable us to share experiences and to acquire knowledge on the role of memory, the many forms it can take and its relationship and contribution towards building the complex concept that is national identity.

And I think I cannot talk about the importance of memory and the strong and common feelings that it can build, which contributes to the creation of national identity, without mentioning history. During the first module of this Conference we will have renowned academic researchers reviewing the importance of memory for the future – under the motto “without memory there is no future”. I would even go so far as to say that without Memory there is no past, no present and no future. How can we know what we are, what we want to be and what we do not want to be in the future, if we disconnect ourselves from our past and from our history?

Memory preserves and dignifies history; whether it is collective or individual, in the shape of an artefact, a letter, a rifle, a radio or an oral testimony. Memory is all of

this and more. Ultimately, memory is each one of us, our actions, our testimonies, our lives.

As such, it is imperative for our young people – and I am pleased to see so many young people here today – to know and to honour our history and our culture, so that they may build a future that properly includes each Timorese citizen, with respect for diversity in unity.

Although a small country, Timor-Leste is proud of its cultural diversity resulting from the many influences the territory has recorded during the years. The various ethnical groups in Timor-Leste give us language diversity, which is conveyed in our dances, our music, our architecture, our handicraft and even our mental representations!

The spirit of our people was forged into centuries-old traditions and animistic beliefs that are an important part of the Timorese indigenous culture. Later on these traditions and beliefs were associated to the Portuguese colonial legacy, of which the Catholic faith and the Portuguese language still remain, and more recently to our resistance history. Perhaps due to all of this, our half-island holds in itself a unique history and a unique culture.

The Timorese Resistance Archive and Museum is a representative and a symbolic guardian of many memories, both in terms of artefacts and of memories told, written, read, filmed and recorded, which are shared with everyone. I believe that recording and preserving these memories is an act of patriotism and that we should all seek to protect this wealth.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen
Dear students,

Although we are a very young country, our history dates back several centuries. It is a history based on diversity, courage, suffering, selflessness and determination.

And that is what memory is. It is recording our past, remembering our ancestors and our land, registering in various ways all that which contributes to acknowledging the existence of something that is transmitted in what we call knowledge.

This year we will be celebrating the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the Portuguese at Lifau, the place where the first Portuguese *nau* moored, seeking our strong and fragrant sandalwood. Those first contacts shaped our historic, cultural and linguistic identity, making us unique among the thousands of islands around us.

Still in our recent history, we endured 24 years of hardship, resulting in many tragic and painful memories that today are consolidated into a shared collective memory that undoubtedly strengthens this feeling of being Timorese. This is a feeling of pride, emotion and hope, but one that clearly shaped our way of being and acting. During the State building and nation building process we have sought to channel this feeling in a positive way.

We have strived to distance ourselves from conflict and to get closer to the values we chose for the country, and which are based on reconciliation, equality, tolerance, solidarity, dialogue and mutual respect.

We must be able to preserve and to share our memories. We must value the humanity that endures conflict and the resulting suffering. Thousands of Timorese citizens died for the ideal of freedom, which is why we have the obligation of ensuring that this ideal is preserved above everything else.

One of the core missions of the Timorese State is ensuring that the heroes of national liberation are honoured as an integral and central part of this collective memory that we are building day after day, and which strengthens our national identity. As such, the history of the resistance must be told, performed, witnessed, heard, read and most importantly not forgotten, since it represents much of what we are today and since it is thanks to it that we have our freedom, our homeland, our Timor.

I am certain that the testimonials collected these past few years throughout the country, the field work by national and international specialists collecting and handling historical documents and oral testimonials, which are today a vital part of the country's heritage, will be handled properly. It is also essential to make sure that memories are not unduly appropriated by interests that would undermine and constrain history.

We have here with us historians and specialists in “memory archives”, who can provide us with rich and important testimonials on the need to gather and protect information sources that help us to understand our past and ultimately to understand ourselves. As I have stated before, we are the outcome of this historical, cultural and social heritage, and of the memories we collect, record and protect.

Consequently it is vital to ensure that we focus on training and that we invest in developing investigation capacity and the study of social sciences. We also need our universities, museums and archives, as well as other relevant institutions, to promote critical analysis and thinking, studying and the production of knowledge. All of this is essential for building a modern and humane society that can overcome feelings of hatred and vengeance, while not forgetting or erasing its memories.

It is also very interesting to see how memory, in its collective aspect, can at the same time bring us closer to others that are further away from us, namely the non-Timorese. Collective memory both strengthens our national identity and brings us closer to a more global identity. While our history is the product of both forced and free exchanges with other peoples and cultures, the fact is that memories are interlinked and enriched by the diversity of others.

And tolerance, a value that we hold so dear to our society, will be better defended and strengthened if we do not remove others from our collective memory.

We have positive examples bringing us closer to others, as a result of sharing common values. Our membership in regional and international political, social, economic, linguistic and cultural forums shows that States and societies need to be part of something that is bigger than them, so as to give them strength and a sense of belonging.

Ladies and gentlemen,

And because today's conference also covers the subject of National Identity, I must speak a little on a matter that requires in-depth debate, which is the issue of identity.

As far as I know, the issue of identity is extremely complex and even sensitive, particularly in today's globalised world. It can breed tension and even conflict. Cultural diversity is a phenomenon as old as humanity itself. Nevertheless, having individuals from different cultures living together and interacting may lead to what we call an identity crisis.

In today's globalised world, where access to knowledge, culture and the markets is so widespread that it knows no borders or time constraints, there is also the temptation to try making values and concepts hegemonic, without respecting differences and even the "others".

Nowadays, when people commit atrocities in the so-called defence of the "identity" of certain groups, it is indeed important to reflect on this complex subject. This is a challenge put forward mostly to the western world, which has inherited a series of influences and thoughts from the "rest of the world", and which should reflect on the way it deals with others.

In this age of globalisation it is essential to promote tolerance and respect. Respect for others, for their beliefs, for their religion, for their colour, for their culture! The world is richer and more interesting because there are many "others". We can be faithful to our values without feeling threatened by the values of others. Our world is lacking the courage to choose tolerance over discrimination.

We too in Timor-Leste must value tolerance and promote unity in diversity. These are essential aspects for our stability and development. The Timorese national identity must be built on these foundations, in a way that honours our tradition of reconciliation. It is important that our young people consolidate this tradition of reconciliation and dialogue into the future, and that they can unite the Timorese around the greater cause of developing the country, as their parents and grandparents did when they united around the cause of national liberation. This is the only way we can honour their memories and our collective history.

We are aware that inequalities in terms of opportunities, as well as economic and social inequalities, are a serious threat to our national identity. These inequalities breed dissatisfaction, which ultimately leads to conflict and instability.

We cannot and must not forget our past. Instead we must learn from it, including from the 2006 crisis. That crisis showed that our institutions were fragile, which brought forward economic, political and socio-cultural conflicts and resulted in an atmosphere of insecurity, with hundreds of thousands of people becoming internally displaced. Additionally, the crisis caused countless political and financial losses to the State.

It is vital that we restore the pride in being Timorese. Not as before, in the sense of being an "identity of resistance", but rather in accordance with the current need for

national development and international affirmation, building a peaceful, tolerant and pluralistic Nation-State.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen
Dearest youngsters,

As you know, Timor-Leste is presiding for the first time over the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries. This community, which brings together countries from four continents, shares more than a language. It also shares history, culture and memories.

This community also shares indescribable acts of solidarity in tragic times of great anguish, suffering and isolation. Those who share common memories are the first to arrive and to offer their friendship and support, without asking for anything in return. This was experienced by Timor-Leste when it received the unconditional support from its brothers and sisters of the CPLP.

Also because of this, it makes sense that in times of peace, stability and growth, these countries become natural development partners. This is the spirit of the CPLP: to improve the lives of its peoples, by mobilising wills and political and diplomatic diligences, as well as human, scientific, technological and financial resources, so as to bring development and progress to each of its citizens.

As such, I am very pleased to see our CPLP friends represented here through the renowned lecturers, to whom I thank for travelling to Timor-Leste in order to offer their knowledge and to cooperate in the development of this subject that is so relevant for us Timorese.

Lastly, ladies and gentlemen, I cannot conclude without thanking the managers and the staff of the Timorese Resistance Archive and Museum for holding this important conference, as well as the organisations and foundations that sponsor it and therefore make it possible. I would like to give a special word of appreciation to the Mário Soares Foundation, which has been an important technical and scientific partner of the Archive and Museum since the very start.

Timor-Leste is a rich country, not because of our oil but because of our people. As such, memory is the knowledge that we feed and transport into the present and the future, and that helps us to be who we are.

It is only when we know ourselves and when we understand our history and our culture that we can understand and accept others, so as to build a pluralistic and tolerant society.

In addition to discussing more scientific aspects on information archiving, preservation and collection methods, I am certain that this Conference will enable us to share and create new memories. And I must say that it is a great honour for me to be here at this Conference and to be part of the collective memory of my country of Timor-Leste.

Thank you very much.

Dili, 26 January 2015
Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão