



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

**ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
DR. RUI MARIA DE ARAÚJO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERENCE ON
“THE CHURCH AND ITS TIMORESE FACE”**

**“The role of the Church in the Struggle for National Liberation: Memory
and Reflection”**

Lahane Palace
9 April 2015



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

The Most Reverend Bishop of Baucau and Apostolic Administrator of Dili, Basílio do Nascimento

The Most Reverend Bishop of Maliana, Norberto Amaral

Distinguished Members of Parliament

Distinguished Government Members

Your Excellency the Presidential Chief of Staff, Dr Fidelis Magalhães

Your Excellency the Rector of the Dom Jaime Garcia Goulart Superior Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Father Domingos da Costa Alves

Illustrious Board Members of the Dom Jaime Garcia Goulart Superior Institute of Philosophy and Theology

Illustrious Priests and Nuns

Illustrious Members of the Conference Organising Committee

Illustrious lecturers

Illustrious guests

Dear students

Ladies and gentlemen,

First and foremost, in my name and on behalf of the Government that I have the honour of leading, I want to renew my condolences to the Timorese Church, which has recently lost one of its faces – a face that history will never forget and that represents so well the role that the Timorese Church played in the struggle for National Liberation.

The Most Reverend Alberto Ricardo da Silva lived a life dedicated to Timor-Leste and its people, sheltering and protecting the Timorese youth in his parish of Motael at the time of the Santa Cruz Massacre in November 1991, suffering the violence of repression alongside them. He was a man of the cloth and a man of his country; a man who embodied precisely that which is my subject today – the support by the Church to the Timorese cause.

I thank the Presidency of the Republic and the Dom Jaime Garcia Goulart Superior Institute of Philosophy and Theology for inviting me to be the lecturer at this Conference on “The Church and its Timorese face”.

In view of the topic that was given to me, “The Church in the Struggle for National Liberation: Memory and Reflection”, I tried recalling some historical facts and reflecting on the role of the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste during the Indonesian occupation. This role was characterised by the defence of human rights and of a people that struggled to achieve National Liberation.

However, I would say that the Church’s contribution to independence predates the Indonesian occupation. Indeed, its main contribution was to forge the very Timorese identity, which throughout the centuries was shaped according to the diversity of our ancestors, our culture and our traditions, always in contact with the Church. This national identity was strengthened after 24 years of great violence, since our people were absolutely convinced of the justice of their cause of independence, freedom and sovereignty. In fact, what effectively distinguishes us from our neighbouring countries, their peoples and their cultures, is precisely this contact with the Church and the Portuguese missionaries, who unquestionably contributed to create an identity in our half island in South East Asia that I would describe as being unique.

Precisely because the Church had a leading influence in the self-determination of the people of Timor-Leste, beyond the period of the Indonesian occupation, I would like to summarise the context of the arrival and permanence of the Church, which is to say the start of the Christianisation of the island of Timor. I will also address the presence of the Church during the colonial period, when Portugal’s rule was already a reality, although with little territorial expression, and when the Church laid the foundations for the Timorese cultural emancipation, providing a priceless contribution to the training and education of the Timorese. Lastly, I will focus on the extremely important role played by the Catholic Church during the Indonesian occupation, when the Catholic religion was truly entrenched in our land, as well as in our hearts and souls, and when key elements of identity, such as the Tetum language, were rescued in order to further strengthen the sense of struggling for a national cause.

In order to speak about the beginning, which was the arrival of Christianity and Catholicism in the island of Timor, we must speak about the Portuguese and the enclave of Oecusse. We must go back 500 years, when Portuguese missionaries disembarked in Lifau and brought to Timor-Leste something that differentiates Timor-Leste from our neighbours – the Catholic religion, which according to the 2010 census is practiced by 96.9% of the country’s population.

As such, the arrival of the Portuguese represented the arrival of a new religion that was embraced and adopted well before the territory was colonised. As we know, the arrival of the Portuguese on the island of Timor in 1515 did not represent the start of the island’s colonisation. That would only happen a couple of centuries later. Indeed, the first

Portuguese governor, António Coelho Guerreiro, only arrived in 1702, marking the start of the establishment of a very small governing, administrative and military structure. It is very interesting to note, according to the historical literature available, that when this first governor arrived a part of the Timorese aristocracy had already been converted, with its members having Christian and Portuguese names. I want to stress that Christianity did not enter our culture and our history by being imposed through arms, but rather as a result of sandalwood-based trade routes, which led to men coming to our island, imbued with a true sense of mission, to evangelise the territory in the name of Portugal.

I want to mention this fact because I believe that it is essential to explain the manner in which Christianity was welcomed by many of the kingdoms existing in our island, and how the presence of the Church, through the religious orders, began its history and its relationship with the peoples of Timor before any colonial power had settled in the territory. In the view of Father João Felgueiras and Father José Martins, recorded in the book "Our Memories of Living in Timor", "Christianity elevated, dignified and enriched that which already pulsed in the nature of the Timorese people. In other words, Christianity found a people with the sense of God (Maromak) and the sense of Sacred (Lulik)".

Already during the more effective period of Portuguese colonisation, which I believe to have started around the middle of the 19th century, the presence of the Church increased, with the religious orders establishing themselves again in greater numbers in what was already Portuguese Timor. These religious orders were essential in training the Timorese, including by opening a number of schools, colleges and seminaries. Although, unfortunately, this presence did not reach everyone, it had a clear impact on those it touched over the generations. The basic training the religious orders provided enabled students to stand out on an intellectual level. The Soibada college is a good example of this.

As such, this was a period in which the Timorese Catholic Church started to lay its foundations and evangelisation was strengthened through the creation of a local clergy. Here I must mention the important work undertaken by Jaime Garcia Goulart, the first Bishop of Dili, who laid the groundwork for the Seara magazine created in 1949. This first Catholic publication was very important for the evangelisation of the country and as a way to convey knowledge about the work being done by the missionaries throughout the territory. Until its definitive cancellation in 1973, due to pressures by the political police, the magazine published articles, reflections and even criticisms against the colonial regime, suggesting the emergence of a Timorese nationalistic movement.

Moving into the specific period of Indonesian occupation, I want to mention a few facts that are vital for understanding the importance of the role of the Catholic Church and of the priests and nuns who protected and supported the people and who continue to contribute towards the construction of a national psyche and identity. As we know, the Timorese were

forced to choose one of the five religions recognised by the Republic of Indonesia, with the Catholic religion being naturally the choice of the majority of the population. It is estimated that the percentage of Catholics increased from 29% in 1973 to 90% at the end of the period of Indonesian occupation.

There were also two key decisions made by the Church that were important to the strengthening of the Timorese Church itself. Firstly, the Church of Rome maintained a direct rapport with the Timorese Church, instead of subordinating it to the Indonesian Catholic Church. Secondly, the Timorese Church made the extraordinary decision to adopt Tetum as the language used in mass. This made Tetum the language of the religion and the language shared by people who were increasingly coming together and whose aspiration for self-determination was being progressively strengthened by a growing feeling of identity.

The Catholic Church and the missionary spirit of Timorese priests and nuns, as well as religious people from other countries, such as Father João de Deus, Father João Felgueiras, Father José Martins and Father Elgíio Locatelli, who resided in Timor-Leste during this period, were essential for building a relationship of trust, faith and devotion, as well as for building a feeling of true justice towards the cause of independence.

The visit to Timor-Leste by His Holiness Pope John Paul II in 1989 was an extremely important moment for our Struggle. The mass held in Dili featured a massive participation by our people. The young, who participated with great devotion in this historical mass, displayed their enormous courage in expressing their desire for freedom and independence. His Holiness Pope John Paull II brought us hope and comfort, and put Timor-Leste on the international agenda.

The Santa Cruz Massacre on 12 November 1991 is a tragic moment that our history will never forget and where the Church once again provided support and protection to the people who had been massacred and savaged. The temple of the Church was often the place of shelter for persecuted people, and while it was not always possible to ensure their physical protection, it nevertheless provided spiritual protection and guidance to people who never lost their faith and hope in an independent Timor-Leste. As such, let us not forget the men and women of the cloth who dedicated their lives to Timor and its people, and who lost their very lives in massacres such as the ones that took place in Suai and Liquiçá.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Unfortunately time is short, so I will just mention specifically the role of two men of the cloth who played a leading role in the struggle for independence: Martinho da Costa Lopes, who devoted his strength to the Timorese cause, suffered alongside the Timorese, denounced the atrocities committed by the Indonesians and never ceased to fight to defend human rights in Timor-Leste. The Martinho da Costa Lopes honorific order bestowed by Timor-Leste pays homage to the fundamental support provided to the people by the Church, the priests and nuns during the struggle for National Liberation.

Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1996, also denounced crimes and demanded justice for the people of Timor-Leste, using the fact that the Church was at the time the only institution that could contact the outside world to request the United Nations in 1989 to hold a referendum on the self-determination of Timor-Leste.

The Catholic Church was indeed determinant in the struggle for the independence of Timor-Leste and in the process of building the Timorese identity. It is also unquestionably a key partner of the State in creating a country of solidarity, fraternity and humanity.

Before I conclude, I just want to stress that the greatest recognition of the immensely important role of the Catholic Church in the struggle for independence is its deserved valorisation inscribed in the Basic Law of the country – the Constitution of the Republic – which states in section 11, under Fundamental Principles, that “the State acknowledges and values the participation of the Catholic Church in the process of National Liberation of Timor-Leste”.

And because it is also essential to speak about the present and the future, I want to seize this opportunity to highlight the importance of continuing to strengthen cooperation between the State and the Church. The role of the Church in the life of the society is very important and its contribution to the consolidation of values and the upbringing of citizens is essential for us to aspire to a more just development that responds to the more pressing needs of people who, after attaining peace, now need to free themselves from poverty so as to live dignified and healthy lives.

Thank you very much.

Dili, 9 April 2015
Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo