



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

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE,
DR RUI MARIA DE ARAÚJO,
DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

**Conference Hall, Hotel Timor
18 May 2015**

Your Excellency the Minister of State, Coordinating Minister of State Administration
Affairs and Justice and Minister of State Administration

Your Excellency the Vice-Minister of State Administration

Your Excellency the Secretary of State of Local Administration of Portugal

Your Excellency the Vice-Secretary for Infrastructure from the Department of
Environment, Land, Water and Planning, State of Victoria

Your Excellencies the Mayors, Councilpersons, Managers and Advisors from Portuguese
Municipalities,

Your Excellency the Lord Mayor of Darwin

Distinguished guest lecturers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Illustrious guests,

On behalf of the Government, I wish to welcome you all, especially those of you who travelled to Timor-Leste to take part in this Fourth International Conference on “Administrative Decentralization and Local Government”. I also want to thank the national and international stakeholders for their commitment, collaboration and support. Their work in this area has been vital.

The policy of the Sixth Government on administrative decentralization and local government is very clear– we want to strengthen local democratic participation by all citizens, we want to improve the distribution of wealth in the country and we want to ensure quality, efficient and effective public service delivery throughout the territory.

It is precisely because we believe that the social and economic development of the Nation can only be truly attained if no one is excluded from it, and also because we believe that the “copy + paste” models are not a recipe for success in political and social processes and in public administration, that this Government has at the centre of its political agenda a set of priorities that include an administrative reform whose ultimate goal, and I repeat ultimate goal, is administrative decentralization and the construction of a local governance model that is aptly adapted to our reality, our culture and, most importantly, our needs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Illustrious guests,

The Governments of Timor-Leste have been discussing administrative decentralization since the restoration of our independence. That is precisely why our Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030 foresees administrative decentralization as a key reform of the State, while safeguarding the need to develop in the first instance the necessary “capacities”. First and foremost, these capacities include institutional capacity, human capacity, administrative capacity, public management capacity and logistical capacity, to name but a few.

Indeed, as it was aptly expressed by the Secretary of State, processes such as administrative decentralization and the creation of a local government structure, duly adapted to our context, require considerable time. Consequently these processes must be seen as long term goals to be achieved in stages. These stages cannot be shortened or bypassed, lest the final outcome not serve the interests of the Timorese people.

Because we were aware of the complexity of the process, administrative decentralization was organized in 3 stages: i) administrative pre-decentralization, which entails the start of the institutional reform, the creation and approval of the necessary legal framework and the preparation of the local development plans; ii) administrative decentralization, under which we would start to apply the approved legislation and a staged delegation of competences and decentralization of public services; and iii) decentralization, whereby it would be possible to transfer powers, responsibilities and duties to the local government structures, which would already be holding elections.

Most of you are aware that this brief summary I have just outlined does not reflect the volume of work and resources that the process has required thus far and will continue to require. We truly have a long and challenging road ahead of us. We will experience

advances and setbacks, but ultimately we will succeed at achieving this administrative reform.

As I have stated previously, past Governments of Timor-Leste have instilled leadership and pro-activeness into how conduct this process politically and technically. One of the most important initiatives was the establishment of Local Consulting Councils in every municipality of the country. This structure seeks active participation by the populations when drafting local development strategies, as well as to ensure that political, social, economic and cultural agents are committed and are an active part of the decisions being made under this reform. Hearing the people and giving them a voice in order to identify the needs and opportunities within their regions are key aspects of our policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Illustrious guests,

Our Constitution gives the legislature the power to determine the form and substance of the issues concerning decentralization. From reading the constitutional precepts on this subject we see that we need to carry out an administrative decentralization reform. As I have said before, this requires a STAGED ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALIZATION process towards a long term goal: the establishment of local governance. Until then, it will be up to central government, through delegation of competences, to carry out the staged decentralization of public services in the municipal structures of public administration. Consequently, the Government will be focussing on this staged administrative decentralization, including the decentralization to the municipalities of the expenditure, planning, budgeting and execution processes starting in 2016.

It is important to bear in mind that decentralization is not an end in itself. The ultimate goal is to provide services to citizens, while ensuring their participation in the affairs of the community so that they may benefit equitably from the progress and the services that the State is required to deliver.

At this stage of national development, our priority is to bring basic services closer to the People. We need children, young people and adults to have access to quality education

and health. These are social rights that are enshrined in our Constitution, but which still require the application of strong public policies that are consistent with these goals. The democratization of public management in accordance with local and regional needs is also achieved through the decentralization of State services.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Illustrious guests

I would not want to end my intervention without a very clear reference to our international partners on this journey.

Timor-Leste has already signed 29 cooperation protocols with several Portuguese councils and with the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities. We have also signed partnerships with the Ministry for Local Government of the State of Victoria and with many of its municipalities, as well as with the Government of the Northern Territory and with the City of Darwin, in Australia.

I want to convey to the mayors and deputy mayors, councilpersons, managers and technical officers in attendance here, as well as to the representatives from the State of Victoria and from the Northern Territory, our enormous satisfaction in working alongside you. This sharing of experiences and lessons-learnt is essential for us to acquire the vital know-how that will make decentralization in Timor-Leste successful.

I also want to mention the strategic importance of the material support, capacity building actions, technical studies and so many other initiatives being provided to us, which contribute for developing the required “capacities” I mentioned before.

Although there is a risk I am leaving some out, I must also mention the collaboration of Argentina, France and Indonesia. These are important partners in this large and rather diverse team that is working on administrative decentralization.

I want to reiterate my appreciation to everyone and urge you to continue supporting us in this reform that we, for now, are terming of STAGED ADMINISTRATIVE

DECENTRALIZATION, always with the goals of bringing basic services closer to the population, benefiting our people, strengthening the ability of our citizens to manage issues concerning their daily needs and lives, and providing new dynamism to our democracy and to the type of citizenship we all want to have.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a successful Conference.

Dili, 18 May 2015

Dr Rui Maria de Araújo