



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

**LECTURE BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE,  
DR RUI MARIA DE ARAÚJO,  
TO THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY WORLD LEADERS FORUM ON  
'GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND SMALL NATIONS'**

**Low Library, Columbia University  
30 September 2015**

Distinguished guests  
Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour to address this World Leaders Forum at Columbia University and I thank you for inviting me to speak today.

I have travelled from the small nation of Timor-Leste to the great city of New York to participate in the United Nations General Assembly.

This year the world celebrates the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations and its achievements since its establishment after World War II.

Timor-Leste has much to thank the United Nations for. After the invasion of our country in 1975, and during our period of occupation, the United Nations was our key forum to advocate for justice and the self-determination of our people. It gave our Foreign Minister in exile, the Nobel Laureate, José Ramos-Horta, the opportunity to lobby the world and shine a light on the suffering of our people.

In 1999 the United Nations conducted a referendum in which the Timorese people bravely and overwhelmingly voted for independence. Following the vote, the United Nations administered our country until 2002 as we prepared to take control of our own destiny.

Our nation started with nothing. After almost 500 years as a Portuguese colony, followed by 24 years of occupation, we were left with no infrastructure, no institutions of government, no health or education system and no money.

Today, however, Timor-Leste is often presented as a successful model of peace building and State building. After a difficult start, we now enjoy peace, a free and democratic society and an open economy with strong growth. We are also fortunate that one of the best decisions we made was to direct every dollar earned from our petroleum resources into a sovereign wealth fund which now holds over \$16 billion dollars.

We achieved our progress with the help of the United Nations family and it wasn't until 2012 that the last UN Mission left our country.

With our deep engagement with the United Nations, we know better than most that it is not a perfect institution and that it is in need of reform.

We also understand, however, that the United Nations plays an important role upholding the global multi-lateral system and protecting small and fragile States.

It is in this context that today I will speak briefly about 'global challenges and small nations'.

It is our experience that while the great powers of the world shape the currents of international affairs, it is often small nations that are the most affected.

From the ravages of climate change, to entrenched poverty and debilitating conflict, the consequences of the actions of great countries can overwhelm fragile and small nations.

We see this clearly in the Pacific where Timor-Leste has many friends and is privileged to be an observer nation of the Pacific Islands Forum. Sadly, some of our island nation friends face an existential threat as rising sea levels see the waves of the vast Pacific Ocean wash over their territory.

Climate change is a global challenge that has a disproportionate impact on many small and vulnerable nations that have themselves contributed little to the problem.

As the whole peoples of some island nations are threatened, the craven self-interest of greater nations is laid bare.

That is why the challenge of climate change demands a global solution. Later this year the world will meet in Paris, at the UN Climate Change Conference, to forge an international response. We look to this Conference with expectation and hope for our shared future.

There are, of course, other global challenges that impact upon small and developing countries.

One of our greatest international challenges is addressing fragility and conflict.

The fragility of countries is condemning people to entrenched poverty, fear and hopelessness. We know well that there can be no development without peace and yet over a billion people in our world live in fragile and conflict affected countries.

We see the corrosive impact of conflict bringing out the poorer demons of the human spirit leading to unspeakable acts of terror against the innocent and the vulnerable. Regrettably, it was a defining shortcoming of the Millennium Development Goals, that not one fragile or conflict affected country achieved even one Millennium Development Goal.

In Timor-Leste we know well, from our lived experience, the destructive effect of conflict on human development and progress.

I was eleven years old when Indonesia invaded our country in December 1975. My adoptive father was soon arrested and imprisoned without trial. The rest of our family escaped to the resistance controlled areas of our country but we lived in desperate fear and hunger and on the run in the mountains.

This was the experience of our people. We found ourselves overwhelmed by the global currents of the Cold War and the fear that communism would spread through Southeast Asia. As a result, western powers supported and supplied an Indonesian dictatorship that was oppressing its own people as well as the Timorese. Over the 24 years of our occupation we lost almost a third of our population.

Following our independence we remained fragile. We suffered the curse of many post-conflict countries with continued internal unrest. It was not until after our internal conflict in 2006, which saw street fighting and death again in our capital Dili, that our people said 'enough'. Together, we recognised that without stability and peace we could not build a State and truly free our people.

Timor-Leste is now fortunate to be living in peace.

Regrettably, too many other nations in the world continue to suffer from fragility and conflict.

Most of us can only weep at the implosion of Syria and the human tragedy and waves of refugees that have followed.

And while Timor-Leste was happy to loose its claim to being the youngest nation in the world following the birth of South Sudan in 2011, we soon despaired as conflict tore this young country apart. We also see conflict across other parts of Africa including fighting in Mali and the Central African Republic and the disintegration of Libya. Many countries across Asia and Latin America also remain fragile and struggle to make human development progress.

Many of these countries are too small, and too weak and too poor to withstand internal conflict and global pressures.

While the developed world may feel proud of its stability we should all recognise that it is, in fact, a rare and precious thing. Even stronger nations struggle to maintain stability and continuity. For example, less than ten nations that existed in 1900 have since avoided the violent overthrow of their government.

It is in this reality that many small and fragile nations need the assistance of the international community to realise peace and build resilient State institutions.

Regrettably, however, even when these countries do achieve peace, they face a new challenge: the challenge of development in an unequal world.

Timor-Leste is still coming to terms with this reality. Despite our progress, too many of our people still face extreme poverty with limited access to quality education and health care.

Across the world, too many people also suffer hunger, preventable diseases and entrenched poverty.

Globalisation has made a huge difference and has helped lift millions of people out of poverty. However, many nations and people that have little to offer the global economy are being left behind.

Even in our region, with the shift of economic weight to a rising Asia, many nations are struggling to grasp the opportunities presented by this profound global adjustment and they remain poor and vulnerable. They find themselves on the bottom in an uneven and unequal world.

And so, inequality is now widely recognised as a pressing global challenge. As His Holiness, Pope Francis, recently said:

*“Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalised: without work, without possibilities, without means of escape.”*

With inequality both within and between nations, millions are trying to escape the grip of extreme poverty.

This challenge is made more difficult by the faltering global economic recovery. And in small nations, such as Timor-Leste, that are reliant on the export of commodities, falling prices are putting additional financial pressure on governments trying to support development.

Small and developing countries cannot address the challenge of inequality and poverty alone. The global economy can be brutal and unforgiving to struggling nations.

It is, therefore, necessary for the world to work together to find pathways so that developing nations can participate in a productive way in the international economy.

We must encourage good governance and transparency in public financial management systems and fight the scourge of corruption.

And we must work towards a new global economic vision that respects the dignity of people and supports the development of nations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I did not come here today just to dwell on the global challenges that buffet the development of small States such as Timor-Leste.

Today I wanted to emphasise the need for a globally united response to these challenges and to confirm our confidence in the possibilities of the international order.

Last week we saw the full promise of international cooperation and good will when the world's leaders came together at the United Nations and committed to 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

Through commitment to these goals the achievement of three exceptional things are within reach: ending extreme poverty, fighting inequality and fixing climate change,

If the world is successful, we will be the first generation to end extreme poverty.

The Global Goals for Sustainable Development are ambitious but it is imperative that we succeed. The Global Goals are for all countries and for all people. And they are most important for developing and small nations like Timor-Leste.

Timor-Leste was deeply involved in the development of the Global Goals. Through Timor-Leste's leadership of the g7+ group of 20 fragile and conflict affected States, we advocated for the importance of addressing fragility and building peace before inequality could properly be tackled and nations developed.

That is why we are so pleased that Global Goal 16 is "Peace and Justice Strong Institutions."

Global Goal 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The inclusion of Global Goal 16 is a clear recognition that conflict and weak institutions are barriers to development.

The international commitment to the Global Goals gives us faith in the promise of cooperation between nations of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is important that small nations realise that they also have a responsibility to contribute to global cooperation and action. We cannot leave it to the great powers to solve our global challenges.

In Timor-Leste, we recognise that after being supported by the international community for so long, it is now our time to give back.

That is why we have been leading the g7+ group of fragile nations to share our experiences and provide support to peace building and State building.

Timor-Leste has helped fund the latest elections in Guinea-Bissau to restore democracy to this fellow nation beset by coups d'état. And we provided financial support in the fight against Ebola in Africa.

Altogether, between 2008 and 2013 Timor-Leste has provided in official development assistance (ODA) to small, fragile and countries facing emergencies, an average of 0.27% of Timor-Leste's non-oil GNI. This is higher than the ODA rates of USA and Japan, and is almost similar to ODA rates from Australia for the year 2014.

Timor-Leste currently holds the Presidency of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries and through this body we are looking to address the shared development challenges of the smaller member States of this organisation.

Timor-Leste is also a strong supporter of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative which provides a global standard to promote open and accountable management of natural resources.

Additionally, Timor-Leste is proud to provide an outstanding example of reconciliation through its peace and friendship with Indonesia. We now enjoy deep bonds of solidarity with our Indonesian brothers and sisters and our relationship provides a global model for partnerships between Muslim and non-Muslim nations.

Perhaps most significantly, however, is our latest experience on inclusive democracy, where the nation has gone through a less divisive and non-confrontational democratic path in the national politics during the last 3 years, whereby the winning parties work hand-in-hand with the opposition to strengthen peace and fortify institutions to achieve commonly agreed development goals, through consensual legislative and budget approvals, without sacrificing the multiplicity of individual thoughts and options. This experience shed some lights on new democratic ways of

doing politics, which are less divisive, non-confrontational, and more conducive to peace building and state building.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is within this context that we believe that the multi-lateral system and international law is so important for the protection and progress of small nations.

The experience of Timor-Leste shows the great value of the United Nations and the importance of dialogue, diplomacy and international law to resolve conflict.

While Timor-Leste restored its independence in 2002, there is, however, one final step we need to take to achieve our full sovereignty. That step is the permanent delimitation of our maritime boundaries with Australia and Indonesia.

Our good friend Indonesia has agreed to commence negotiations to finalise our maritime boundaries. Australia, however, has so far refused to negotiate a maritime boundary with Timor-Leste in the Timor Sea – a 435 mile wide, oil rich, stretch of water between Timor and the northern coast of Australia. We are hopeful the new Prime Minister of Australia will revisit his government's position and sit down and talk with us like neighbours and friends.

Like Timor-Leste, Australia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which imposes an obligation on States to reach final agreements on maritime boundaries. Within this framework, we are asking Australia to meet with us and agree on our maritime boundaries set in accordance with international law.

We recognise that the future of our people and our nation's sovereignty continues to depend on the international system and respect for international law.

Like other small and developing nations, we look to the international community and the multi-lateral system of global governance to deliver justice and human development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While the small and developing nations of the world are vulnerable to the global challenges of climate change, conflict and inequality, we also have confidence in the promise of international cooperation.

Small States cannot address global challenges alone. Our interconnected world demands global solutions. That is why Timor-Leste is such a strong supporter of the United Nations and the solidarity of the international community.

It is only through working together that we give can achieve global peace and justice, sustainable development and uphold respect for human dignity.

Thank you very much.

Dr Rui Maria de Araújo  
New York, 30 September 2015

