



**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,  
AT THE DINNER CELEBRATING THE 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
PROCLAMATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE 500 YEARS OF THE  
INTERACTION BETWEEN TWO CIVILISATIONS: TIMOR-LESTE AND  
PORTUGAL AND THE AFFIRMATION OF THE TIMORESE IDENTITY**

**Oe-Cusse Ambeno  
27 November 2015**

Your Excellencies,

The President of the Court of Appeal  
The Vice-Speakers of Parliament  
The Former President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Dr José Ramos-Horta  
The Former Speaker of the National Parliament of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, Dr Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo  
The Former Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and President of the Authority of the Special Administrative Region of Oe-Cusse Ambeno, Dr Mari Alkatiri  
Bishop Basílio do Nascimento, President of the Episcopal Conference of Timor-Leste  
Bishop Norberto do Amaral, Vice-President of the Episcopal Conference of Timor-Leste  
Archbishop Ioan Robu, President of the Romanian Episcopal Conference

Your Excellencies,

The illustrious representatives from the CPLP countries  
The representatives from the National Parliament Committees  
The Members of Government  
The Executive Secretary of the CPLP  
The representatives from the Sovereignty Bodies  
The representatives from the Diplomatic Corps  
The representatives from the Churches and the Civil Society

Illustrious guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I want to thank everyone for being here at this dinner. It is a great honour for us that some of you have travelled from so far in order to join us today in celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Proclamation of Independence and the 500 years of the interaction between Timor-Leste and Portugal and the affirmation of the Timorese identity.

The stage for this get-together dinner could not be any more fitting. It was here in Lifau that the Portuguese navigators moored their first vessels 500 years ago and that the first capital of Portuguese Timor was set up. It was in 1515 that the Portuguese made their first contact with Timor-Leste, bringing with them Christianity and Catholicism, as well as their language and culture, which made an enormous contribution to our national identity.

Therefore, in the year marking five centuries after this meeting, we have symbolically chosen November 28<sup>th</sup>, the date when we celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Proclamation of Independence, to celebrate these historical landmarks for Timor-Leste and for our people, of which we are most proud.

It was in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century that the Portuguese started their maritime expansion, after conquering Ceuta. This entailed successive discoveries in the great African

continent, enabling Vasco da Gama to reach the Indies and Pedro Álvares Cabral, while searching for trade with the East, to stray from his path and find Brazil. Continuing this maritime odyssey and attracted by the wealth of the East, the taking of Malacca enabled a strong Portuguese presence in this region. This led to a new logic of doing business, through which the Portuguese strengthened their trade relations with East Asia. Subsequently the Portuguese arrived in Solor and Flores and, later on, in Timor, attracted by our valuable sandalwood.

The Portuguese and the missionaries brought and left behind many linguistic and historical features, knowledge, values and feelings that took root and remain in our culture today. These have shaped and influenced our upbringing and our education, making Timor-Leste truly unique.

The assimilation of these features brought by the Portuguese enriched the indigenous Timorese identity even further, making our people unique in the region. Subsequently we forged our identity with our culture and the Portuguese language. It is this Portuguese language that enables us to promote the identity of our peoples and to strengthen friendship and solidarity within the CPLP.

And it is this identity of ours, this common sense of values, feelings and solidarity that makes us stand out in the international community and that gave us the courage and the resilience to fight for the right to self-rule.. It was this unique culture and this unique identity that made Timor-Leste fight to regain its independence for 24 years, after it was taken away from us in 1975.

These five centuries of interaction between the Timorese and the Portuguese have contributed to the construction of a Timor-Leste with democratic roots and humanistic values, as well as a determined people with strong and assertive leadership, who have managed to create an atmosphere of peace, stability and safety in the country. Today the country is growing strongly, has political maturity and is set on the path towards development and prosperity. Indeed, Timor-Leste is elevated in the international stage as an example to be followed.

It is this “spirit” and this “focus on the future” that have enabled us to achieve much progress, of which this Special Administrative Region and Special Zone of Social Market Economy of Oe-Cusse Ambeno, where we are today, is a good example. This gives us even more courage to continue working to develop our people and our country both socially and economically.

And this is what we are celebrating – what we are today as a people, our identity and what we have been able to achieve. This success fuels our desire to achieve even more in the future!

Thirteen years after the Restoration of our Independence, I would like to take this opportunity that we are all here at this get-together dinner to once again thank Portugal for their diplomatic efforts and thank the Portuguese people for taking our cause as their own. I also thank our brothers and sisters in the CPLP, which were the first to offer us their unconditional support and to make us feel part of the same family, as indeed

could be expected from countries that share common language, feelings and values with us.

Our identity, which encompasses a set of feelings, makes us people who assume the leading role in setting our country's course. Today we are the navigators of Timor-Leste and, like the navigators who arrived in the caravel we have dedicated today, we Timorese are "the people at the helm"!

Thank you for your presence and I invite you all for a toast for the sake of the identity of the Timorese nation!

Dr Rui Maria de Araújo  
Dili, 27November 2015