



**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 ASEAN CIVIL SOCIETY CONFERENCE/  
ASEAN PEOPLES' FORUM 2016**

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

As I was listening to Dr Maydom and Mr. Jerald Joseph speaking I remembered thirty years ago when I was on that side of the aisle, speaking with the same enthusiasm, and I thought “It’s a bit odd that I now stand in the other side of the aisle speaking to represent the views of a democratic elected government”.

Mr. Chairman and Co-Chairmen of the ASEAN People’s Forum

Members of Government

Ambassadors

Distinguished delegates and guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to be invited to share Timor-Leste’s experience at this august gathering, and it is indeed a great privilege for the Civil Society Organizations in Timor-Leste to host this year’s ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples’ Forum. As such, I would like to congratulate FONGTIL and all the civil society organizations of Timor-Leste for organizing and hosting this conference here in Dili, and to also express my humble gratitude to all ASEAN civil society organizations, firstly for choosing to hold this year’s conference in Timor-Leste, and most importantly, to do so as a sign of solidarity to Timor-Leste’s unwavering resolve to be a member of the ASEAN family.

To all of you coming from all ASEAN countries, I wish you a warm welcome, and a heartfelt appreciation to the sixteen points enshrined in the final ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People’s Forum 2016 Statement issued by the Regional Steering Committee, most particularly your renewed solidarity with our unfinished saga in restoring our maritime sovereignty in the Timor Sea.

As you are all well aware, this conference precedes Timor-Leste’s full acceptance as a member into the ASEAN family. I sincerely hope, therefore, that the success of this conference can be an additional confirmation of Timor-Leste’s readiness to be a full member of ASEAN, and a living testament of how Government and Civil Society cooperate in Timor-Leste to achieve national objectives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Here in Timor-Leste, we have a vibrant civil society engaged in the process of nation-building and state-building. This can be seen in the role civil society organizations play in shaping this nation-state as well as in the socioeconomic development of the country, ranging from advocacy to the direct and active role in the process of service delivery in important sectors such as water and sanitation, hygiene, agriculture, and education and health, just to mention but a few.

In acknowledging this vibrancy, the Government of Timor-Leste came to define policies and the legal framework for registration and engagement of civil society organizations since 2004, and had provided since 2008 financial assistance to some CSOs, as a means to support their activities for the benefit of communities in the important sectors mentioned above.

This relationship is constructed upon the genuine conviction that civil society is an important partner of the government during the process of nation-building and state-building in countries like Timor-Leste, where almost everything - from policy formulation to policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation of results-, had to be built from scratch, and had important implications in the day-to-day life of people who struggled during 500 years of foreign domination. By the fact our nationhood was shaped and our sovereignty restored through civil society activism, left us with no hesitation about the vital role of civil society in shaping the destiny of nations.

The principles upheld in this relationship are transparency and accountability of actions and the application of funds. While civil society demands the government to be accountable in the service provision to the people, and be accountable for public funds in a transparent manner, civil society organizations are likewise obliged to take a share of responsibilities in service provision, particularly in remote and hard-to-reach communities, and be accountable to the funds made available to them either by the State budget, or by development partners and philanthropies, in the name of the communities they are supposed to serve.

Additionally, from the acceptance of the importance of civil society organizations in the socioeconomic development of the country, the government of Timor-Leste pays special attention to the opinion of civil society organizations when it comes to public policies and legislations affecting the lives of society. The cycle of policy formulation and legal drafting is most of the times permeated by extensive consultations with civil society organizations. Examples of this are the preparation of the Land Title and Land Expropriation Laws recently submitted to the National Parliament, which were preceded by extensive consultations with the community and civil society organizations, followed by public audiences with multi-stakeholders, including CSOs held by the National Parliament itself.

It is noteworthy mentioning at this stage, that despite the close relationship between the government and civil society organizations, the government hardly expected, let alone requested CSOs to cease criticizing the Government. Timor-Leste would not be an open society we are all proud to be today, had it not for the openness and tolerance to criticism all governments had shown so far.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year when the VI Constitutional Government took office, as Head of Government I called for a government-civil society partnership to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the service delivery by the government through a mechanism called social audit.

Whereas social audit has been implemented in different countries differently dictated by their respective circumstances, its principal aim is to ensure that public services delivered by the government to their citizens are in line with their stated objectives.

In Timor-Leste, social audit, on one hand, becomes a space where the people as the ultimate beneficiaries of public services have a say about the way services are being delivered to them and on the other, becomes a vehicle for government institutions to be held accountable, and be responsive to the community they are entrusted to serve. The partnership between Government and civil society organizations represented by FONGTIL was formalized by a Memorandum of Understanding signed in May 2015, focusing on four key service delivery sectors: Agriculture, Education, Health and Basic Infrastructures.

To put the memorandum into practice, the civil society organizations, through FONGTIL, had established their own mechanism, which I hope some representatives here will talk about later.

Within the government, a Social Audit Unit was established within the office of the Prime Minister. This unit is tasked to manage the incoming complaints from community, either directly or through civil society organizations, and to coordinate and monitor the response from relevant government institutions. This task is facilitated by social audit focal points within relevant line ministries, who will work within their respective ministries to ensure proper institutional response to the issues raised by the community.

As an example, when a community member or an organization complains about the construction of a public infrastructure, their complaint will be transmitted to the social audit unit, who would in turn communicate with the focal point at the ministry of public works to ensure the complaint is responded to by the minister or ministry who is managing the project.

I am pleased to note that this work has contributed to a number of improvements in service delivery. Between June and December 2015 the Social Audit Unit registered some 18 major complaints from the community out of which 17 cases were addressed. For the first half of 2016, the Social Audit Unit has received a total of 42 cases, 32 cases out of which have been resolved so far.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Timor-Leste moves towards the second phase of the implementation of its Strategic Development Plan approved for the period between 2011-2030, where it seeks to harmonize that Strategic Development Plan with the UN 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals, and where increasing efforts are directed to diversify the economy of the country, it is extremely important that civil society organizations be engaged as the important partner of government it used to be during the last 14 years.

Through our own experience, we have come to appreciate the role civil society can play in the difficult journey of our nation-building and state-building, as well as in the socio

economic development of the country. Our experience also shows that civil society activism is not always naive, nor their criticism always injurious as government officials tends to believe.

As you gather here to discuss issues pertinent to the ASEAN region and the common challenges we face together as a community of people, nations and states, I hope you also appreciate the particular challenges governments throughout the region and throughout the world face in the different stages of nation-building, state-building and socioeconomic development, as well as the hard choices each one of them would have to make within the hard realities of their respective countries.

As our humble example in Timor-Leste can reveal, successful engagement require both sides, civil society and governments, to genuinely acknowledge and accept each other's roles in the process of nation-building, state-building and socioeconomic development. I hope this conference further enlighten the meaningful partnerships civil society can forge with the governments throughout the region for the good of the region and its people.

I wish you all fruitful discussions over the next days, and a vote of success for the conference.

Thank you once again for inviting me to be here today and for all friends who has a stance in the independence of this country, welcome home and please enjoy what Timor-Leste achieved during the last 14 years.

Díli, 3 de August 2016  
Dr Rui Maria de Araújo