



PRIME
MINISTER

**SPECIAL REMARKS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT THE ASEAN BUSINESS SUMMIT 2023
PLENARY SESSION - ASEAN MATTERS:
RESILIENCE AND STABILITY IN A FRACTIOUS GLOBAL
ECONOMY**

The Sultan Hotel, Jakarta
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Palácio do Governo,
Avenida Presidente Nicolau Lobato,
Dili, Timor-Leste

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour to speak today at this important event, the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit 2023, and to speak on the topic of resilience and stability in a fractious global economy.

ASEAN has emerged as a critical driver of the global economy. With a market size of \$2.3 trillion and 600 million people, ASEAN is an economic powerhouse that has transformed Southeast Asia.

A key reason Timor-Leste is seeking accession to ASEAN is to become part of this success story. Full membership of ASEAN will provide business and foreign direct investors the confidence and security to invest in Timor-Leste.

Attracting foreign direct investment is critical to growing Timor-Leste's economy, creating jobs and to modernise and transform the economic structure of our nation.

We also want to be part of ASEAN's 'people-centred' approach to growth and development. This approach has allowed wide participation and ownership of ASEAN's affairs. It has helped increase per capita wealth, life expectancy and health outcomes, lifting millions out of poverty.

This transformation has been achieved by building trust between ASEAN countries and by promoting stability, unity and peace in our region. ASEAN has succeeded bringing countries with diverse cultures and histories together to form a community bound by a shared commitment to tolerance, friendship and cooperation.

Given the success of ASEAN, it is easy to forget that Southeast Asia was not always a region of such unity and cooperation. It was not that long ago that our region was a victim of colonisation and the Cold War; torn apart by other nations greed, conflict and war.

And the Timorese people were not immune. The dynamics of the Cold War, and the demands of Western powers, led to a period of occupation in our country and our difficult struggle for self-determination.

It is because we remember suffering the proxy wars of the Cold War that our region refuses to take sides in today's geo-strategic contest between the world's great powers.

It is with this understanding of how far our region has come that we can see how remarkable ASEAN's economic achievements are. And can admire the rise of miracle economies within ASEAN – including in Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore.

Friends, it is important that we recognise the international significance of ASEAN's success and its ability to build strong and stable nations from fragility and conflict.

Sadly, however, the great successes of ASEAN, as well as those of East Asia, are not being replicated in other parts of the world.

Instead of the possibility of miracle economies there is conflict and war. Instead of cooperation and harmony, there is the widespread loss of human dignity and hope.

Many countries in the world are unable to integrate, in any meaningful way, into the global economy. And this is resulting in too many people without hope of meaningful employment, many living in slums, in societies that are in crisis.

We are also experiencing more extreme weather conditions – floods, droughts, cyclones and rising sea levels – due to the failure of the global powers to respond to climate change.

And it is already fragile States that are experiencing the worst effects of climate change. Our neighbours in the Pacific Islands are proof of that as they deal with the threat of being swamped by rising sea levels.

The failure of the global economic system to develop the poorest parts of the world is resulting in fragility and dangerous declines in State capacity.

It is fueling mass migration and the tragedies we are seeing on the shores of Europe. It is feeding extremism, transnational crime and the growth of militia groups.

It would, of course, be easy to blame these countries, or their people. But to do so would be to ignore the echoes of history.

It would be to ignore the impact of conflict, economic exclusion and foreign intervention that keeps these countries trapped in a state of fragility.

And so, perhaps what we need to do now is to establish a better international order that is based on a vision of human solidarity and shared prosperity.

An international order that helps fragile States build resilience and stability.

It was with this realisation - and following a period of unrest in our own country - that Timor-Leste joined together with other Least Developed Countries who had also faced conflict and fragility.

We believed that it was important that our collective voice was heard – especially when decisions were being made about our countries without us.

We established the g7+ group of countries, which now has around 20 members from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific.

The g7+ works hard to support and represent our countries and to make our voice heard on the international stage.

The g7+ now has observer status at the United Nations which allows it to provide a collective perspective on the agenda and work of the United Nations.

The g7+ supports a more active role for the United Nations in promoting State resilience and stability.

We are fortunate that His Excellency, António Guterres, is Secretary-General of the United Nations. We believe that there is no better person to lead the United Nations and fight for a better international order that provides human dignity, justice and equality for all.

Recognising ASEAN's extraordinary achievements, I believe ASEAN has a role helping build resilience and stability in fragile States.

ASEAN has built a region with high State capacity, effective governments, the rule of law and public order, and healthy and educated workforces. It has adopted a people centered approach that emphasises tolerance and mutual respect.

While so many countries around the world struggle with fragility and unrest, ASEAN provides examples of strong emerging economies that are structured for the benefit of the people.

We must not only highlight ASEAN's stability, security and contribution to global growth, we must ask how ASEAN can help support resilience and stability in fragile States.

ASEAN can provide models of sovereign development for building strong communities, social infrastructure and economic resilience.

The West does not have the answers to global development. While we live in a world that is economically interconnected, too many fragile States face economic exclusion and poor development outcomes.

For over half a century, ASEAN has promoted stability, unity and peace in our region. ASEAN has shown the world the power of dialogue and what can be achieved when nations come together with a common purpose.

And it has shown us the benefits of more inclusive economic growth, where prosperity is widely shared.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I now urge ASEAN to do more – I ask it to look beyond our region and become part of a global network to support fragile States, where democracy and human rights should be the basis of building peaceful States.

In a volatile global economy ASEAN can make an important contribution to building international resilience and stability, through tolerance and human dignity.

Working together, we can establish a better international order based on a vision of human solidarity and shared prosperity.

Thank you very much