



SPEECH

BY

H.E. MR. KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO

**PRIME MINISTER OF THE DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL DINNER AT PARLIAMENT
HOUSE**

Canberra, Australia, 25 August 2008

The Honourable Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister
Your Excellencies
Honourable Ministers
Members of Parliament
Distinguished guests

I would like to thank the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, the Australian Government and the Australian people for welcoming us to Canberra.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge members of my delegation:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Zacarias da Costa;
Minister for Finance, Ms Emilia Pires;
Minister for Justice, Lúcia Lobato;
Minister for Education, Mr João Cândia Freitas;
Ambassador to Australia, Mr Hernani Coelho;
Chief of the Defence Force, Brigadier Taur Matan Ruak;
Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment, Mr Bedito Freitas;
Secretary of State for Security, Mr Francisco da Costa;
Our Consul-General in New South Wales, Mr. Abel Guterres; and the Australian Ambassador to Timor-Leste, Mr Peter Heyward, who is part of our delegation for this visit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The men and women of this delegation are just a few of the, educated, professional and talented Timorese who are transforming our humble nation, members of the first coalition Government of Timor-Leste.

For our nation, this coalition Government could be considered one of our greatest achievements this year.

It was formed at a time when our nation needed to give voice to political inclusion where the diversity of ideas was valued as an integral part of nation building.

We knew that **this** coalition could foster a climate through our own leadership, that would spread through our institutions, our private sector, our public service and most importantly, to civil society.

And so, on August 8, 2007 a little more than a year ago, our journey together began...

Our national priorities were clear:

National stability,
Social welfare,
Economic recovery, and
Service delivery.

We wanted to create better human conditions for the people of our nation, build vital infrastructure, reform Government institutions and establish the foundations for economic growth.

Big dreams, big challenges.

Like any Government, we were counting on the archival process passed on from an outgoing Government to incoming Government known as a 'handover' – but we had nothing due to the limited capacity of our public service.

Mapping a course for recovery in a developing nation is challenging, but with little to no data, the challenges become monumental

We also inherited serious issues which stemmed from the crisis in 2006 that seemed, at the time, insurmountable.

Ten percent of our population was displaced.

A third of the army had departed with grievances against the State.

Serious tensions simmered between the police and the army.

And a group of armed rebels roamed the country threatening the core of national stability

These my friends, are not challenges often faced in developed nations like Australia, but the course to reconciliation **can** be based on the values that built those nations:

Ladies and Gentlemen

It was only through dialogue and concord that we mapped our course. And a year later, I can proudly report:

- Over 50,000 IDP's have returned to their homes, with 21 IDP camps closed.
- The issues with the petitioners have been resolved and they have been successfully assimilated back into civilian life.
- The armed rebels have all surrendered peacefully.
- And the army and police for the first time worked under a joint command after Feb 11 when, we as a nation, with the support of the international security forces, were able to maintain peace and stability.

This was a turning point for our nation. It was the defining moment when The Timorese, from East to West, from all political parties, took a stand and said, **no more violence!**

There was a shift in the national mentality.

But I tell you of these achievements because they are not just the achievements of my Government, **these my friends, are the collective achievements of OUR Governments.**

We can credit much of our progress to the support given by Australia and the leadership demonstrated by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

You are our loyal friends and our steadfast partners, you defend the sovereignty of Timor-Leste with equal vision and equal determination.

The kindness you extend as our largest donor reaches every aspect of our nation building. From health to education and from institutional and human capacity building to peacekeeping.

And today you announced further support – to build the capacity of our public service, to assist us with our infrastructure plans and to provide further scholarships for our youth - amongst other valuable initiatives to advance and progress our county.

Your contribution continues to impact profoundly on our economic and social development which will be recognised for generations to come.

But the building of Australia was a long story through decades of struggle and the Timor-Leste story will be no different.

The only difference is that our struggle is being **shared**, and it is not just between our two Governments.

But now between our schools, our local councils, our churches, our communities and our soldiers - who proudly stand side by side in Timor-Leste.

And with so much support comes equal responsibility; the responsibility of my Government to invest in our own nation, to create the economic and social conditions which will attract the private sector and engage international investors.

To reform Government institutions so that **never again in the history of our nation** can politics compromise the independence of those institutions.

To establish the legal frameworks for good governance based on the principles held by all free and fair democracies, and above all, to ensure that we, as a socially compassionate nation, continue to take care of our most vulnerable – the elderly, the disabled, and the infirmed to ease their suffering.

We are an emerging Asian economy growing at one of the highest rates in the region; but our real wealth is not in the economic forecasts, but in our people.

They have fought,
They have sacrificed,

and it will be through their commitment and dignity, combined with the support of our friends and neighbours like Australia, which will deliver our success story.

That is why your Governments commitments to Timor-Leste - especially in building our human resources - we receive with the greatest of appreciation.

I would like to thank The Prime Minister, his cabinet, and all the Government officials involved in organising this visit.

I would also like to recognise the Leader of the Opposition, Dr Brendan Nelson, who exemplifies excellence in leadership through strong opposition, I invite him to visit our beautiful nation once again.

I want to finish tonight by acknowledging all my friends here today, who have already been welcomed to our wonderful country, and encourage others to visit us soon.

In Timor-Leste we have a saying that visitors who drink our coconut juice will be charmed and bound to return. But I don't think it is the coconuts that hold our nation's charm. It is the unique warmth and character of our people that draws visitors back to our tropical shores and our stunning mountainous terrain.

Nevertheless, I also recommend the coconut juice.

Thank you very much – obrigado barak.