



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS

BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO

AT THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

WOMEN FOR PEACE

“Women as creative agents for peace building”

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Díli

4-6 March 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear friends,

First, please allow me to express my profound appreciation to be able to take part in this important event - an event that in the same sentence contains two powerful words: Women and Peace!

The history of Timor-Leste is made by many stories of women that worked hard, that suffered, that made all kinds of sacrifices – always with so much courage and dignity – on behalf of the liberation and peace for their sons and daughters, as well as on behalf of all the future generations.

When the women of Timor-Leste come together for peace building, you can expect that they will come from every corner of the country and that they will continue to shape our country's history.

In fact, women will always insist on their role in making history, to make hope and peace prevail, and I think that all humankind is thankful for that! Their wisdom, their compassion, but mainly their strength, can help transform society to one of development and peace.

To do this, women must be given their rightful opportunities. The presence of so many women from around the world, here today, underlines the weight of the pledge for women of Timor-Leste to join hands with Government for Unity, Peace and Development.

This is a daunting task. The legacy of oppression weighs heavily on women. As long as women are bound by poverty, and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance.

As long as outmoded ways of thinking prevent women fulfilling their full potential and contribution to our society, progress will be slow. As long as the nation refuses to acknowledge the equal role of more than half of its People, it is doomed to failure.

Yet we can acknowledge on the **2nd International Conference of Women for Peace** that in its short life, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste has marked out significant milestones towards improving the status of women. For this we congratulate the women of Timor-Leste: in Government; in business; and in our community; in religious bodies; in women's organisations and elsewhere throughout our nation

Our participation in the 2nd International Conference of Women for Peace in Dili this year put the challenges facing Timorese women in the context of what is happening elsewhere in the world. It has strengthened the forces for change in our country.

Our Constitution, in whose drafting women played a key role, commits our society to the equality of women. And by ratifying the **Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, Timor-Leste has committed itself to specific and practical approaches for attaining gender equality and the empowerment of women.

These commitments assist us in our task, because they allow us to draw on the experience and the victories of women across the world. The challenge now, for government, for women, and for men is to seize the opportunities provided by these new formal instruments, so that women can indeed play their role in transforming our society, in generating sustained economic growth, in reconstruction and development.

For its part Government is proud of the start it has made, with its social partners, in improving the lives of our people. Better access to health care, especially for women and young children, nutrition schemes for children, provision of clean water and electricity to communities that never had them, and land reform - these are just some of the first steps in our nation's fight on poverty which weighs so heavily on women.

As we build on this start, we have to ensure that the needs and interests of women inform our policies and the way we implement them. This requires the creation of a framework of commitments throughout government and the establishment of mechanisms for mobilising resources, coordinating policies and monitoring implementation.

The success of these measures will require women to define their needs and priorities and bring them to the attention of government. It will require that you speak with a clear and united voice. It will require speedy movement towards a national and truly representative voice of the women of Timor-Leste.

This Conference provides an important Forum for Women to express such needs and priorities. It will be my duty as Prime Minister to take into account the recommendations from this International Conference, undertake the

actions and the reforms which are needed and ensure that all Members of Government continue to strive for the progress of women and gender equality in all policy areas.

Let's take this opportunity to join our hands and our voices in response to the call of Women for Unity, Peace and Development. Let us continue to strive and demonstrate concrete results to measure our beautiful words.

Let's make Equality a reality for the Women of Timor-Leste!

Thank you very much!

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão

5 March 2009