



ADDRESS

BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO

ON THE OCCASION OF THE START OF THE POPULAR CONSULTATION

CONCERNING THE DRAFT LAW

ON THE OWNERSHIP OF IMMOVABLE ASSETS

(LAND LAW)

Canossian Sisters Hall, Becora

Dili, 12 June 2009

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure and pride that I announce the start of the public consultation project concerning the Draft Law on the Ownership of Immovable Assets (Land Law). When approved, this law will enable for the first time the formal acknowledgement of land property rights by the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, thereby giving practical content to the constitutional precept ensuring property rights to every national citizen.

The relationship between people and land is the basis of our culture, our origin and our destination. For centuries, property rights over our land were determined by foreign nations. Ever since the Restoration of Independence, the Timorese people awaits the resolution of the situation of indecision inherited from colonialism.

Families and entire communities were forced to leave their original villages and sucos and start their lives again in other parts of the territory. This multiplicity of formal rights, resulting from the Portuguese and Indonesian times, as well as the forced resettlement of populations, has left independent Timor with a confusing legacy in the sector of lands and properties. Solving this complex situation is a difficult and sensitive task that requires courage by the Government and patience by the citizens. Everyone has expectations, fears and longings.

As such, this Government believes that this issue cannot have its resolution postponed any more. The vagueness of property rights only favours the rich and the powerful, who can impose their wills by the strength of money and politics. On the other hand, the formal acknowledgement of property rights will benefit the majority of the population, as it will give poorer families the necessary security for investing in their lands, encouraging them to sow, produce and build. Land is also the means through which wealth is passed on from generation to generation, and ensuring the right of property gives judicial security to this transfer of patrimony from parents to their children. Knowing that land will be transmitted to future generations within the family also serves to encourage the preservation and sustainable use of this asset.

One thing is certain: when it concerns lands and properties, every Timorese has a story to tell, a problem, a doubt or a question. Every citizen knows many cases involving land issues. The purpose of the public consultation that is started today is precisely to give every Timorese the opportunity to make a contribution, to put a question and to present a suggestion in relation to the draft law, so that the future land law may cover the largest possible number of cases and situations.

We are aware that drafting this law was a long and hard process, which required a lot of studying and researching and a great effort by the Minister of Justice. I would like to extend my congratulations to H.E. the Minister of Justice and her team for preparing this complex and important draft law and for submitting it to public consultation, which is something that always strengthens legitimacy and democracy.

Thank you.