



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNITY BASED
ECOTOURISM**

Díli, 24 August 2009

Excellencies,

Dear Members of Government

Dear Members of the National Parliament

Dear Guest Speakers

Dear representatives from NGOs and International Agencies

Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this International Conference on Community Based Ecotourism, in particular those of you who came from afar to participate in this event.

Right now I would like to congratulate the Minister of Tourism, Trade and Industry for this excellent initiative of organizing a Conference dedicated to a theme that is so important for the young Nation of Timor-Leste.

This conference is part of within the official program of the celebrations of the 10th Anniversary of the Popular Consultation, and those who know Timor-Leste will surely understand just how important this subject is, precisely at a time when we are celebrating a date that means so much to every Timorese citizen.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to be so bold as to speak about my Country, to say it is undoubtedly a magical place, with an unique history and culture, which carries a mystical soul enshrined within the perfect combination of the best that nature has to give us.

Our tropical forests; our sumptuous mountains that descend unto our paradise-like beaches; the depth of our seas, which conserve the wealth of our corals and maritime fauna – these were the elements that nurtured our People during the terrible times of the resistance.

We can even say that our People's perseverance was fed by the strength of the nature that this "half-island" possesses and where, despite the suffering, the forced departure of our children, parents and siblings... and almost even our dreams, the sun never stopped shining and the great beauty of our landscape never let us lose heart.

Because of all of this, to preserve our "mother nature" and to develop ecotourism are priorities for the Government of Timor-Leste.

Ladies and gentlemen,

By celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Timorese People's remarkable display of courage in voting for its right to National Independence, we wish to mark a new stage in the history of Timor-Leste, in which we remove from the conflicts of the past and finally live in an atmosphere of peace and stability. We are ready to move firmly towards national development and the reduction of poverty.

Tourism is one of the main sectors that can ensure the economic development of the country, having already contributed around 11% of the overall GDP. It is expected that tourism trips will be increase to 1.6 billion by 2020.

As I have said already, our Country has enormous tourism potential. In cultural and historical terms, we have unexplored natural landscapes and incredible biodiversity. For all this, tourism is undoubtedly a priority sector for national development, affecting other sectors such as agricultural, rural and infrastructure development, and which must be thought over and planned with due care, to ensure the preservation of nature and to contribute towards the sustainable development of the population.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Accordingly, ecotourism projects to be developed in our Country must seek to preserve our natural and cultural legacy, promote equality and the reduction of poverty in local communities, and to preserve the ancestral traditions of the Timorese people, namely in local music, dance, cooking and handicraft.

Tourism is an important factor for the economic growth, not just because of the revenues and employment it generates, but also because of all the other infrastructures associated with it, namely: restaurants, hotels, leisure and entertainment equipments, and small and medium businesses.

However, tourism development must be balanced. We must capitalize the unexplored areas of Timor-Leste and working in close cooperation with local communities, to ensure that the Timorese people are both partners and beneficiaries in this process.

In this task it is essential to involve our more remote communities. We need to realize the dreams of all Timorese citizens, involving them directly in this great project of national development, with confidence that the Timorese are among the most skilled people in the world in what regards transforming basic resources into major achievements, and consequently that we can realize our dream of development without any type of exclusion.

We want to develop tourism in Timor-Leste, but we want the right tourism for our Nation. We want to be hosts to tourists that respect and value that which are the most precious things to us, the Timorese People – our land, our nature, our culture.

In this way it will be possible to provide Timorese citizens with better opportunities to improve their lives. We can give you some examples of successful community intervention in the sector of tourism, namely:

- Project “Tua Koin Eco-Aldeia” in Ataúro has had a rather positive impact in the management of marine resources, contributing to increase the income of the local community;
- Valusere Cooperative in Tutuala showed an increase of USD 2,500-4,000 per month in terms of revenue increase in its last quarter review. Furthermore it achieved significant improvements in terms of the living conditions of fishermen, by improving fishing activities, transportation services and local guides;

- Also in this region, the community members had benefitted through the creation of the First National Park Nino Konis Santana. And I would also like to use this opportunity to compliment the work done by Haburas Foundation and its Portuguese partner CIDAC;
- The Com community has managed to increase community revenues by developing support activities to tourists and increasing the sales of handicraft products;
- The Maubisse community has established housing facilities and other services, with support from the Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry.

These are small examples of projects we want to multiply in order to benefit local populations, taking into consideration that it has been proven that community initiatives for developing tourism have been having positive effects in terms of the living conditions of the communities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like you to use the next two days to reflect on this: we can achieve sustainable development if we work together towards developing community based tourism in Timor-Leste.

During this process we may also have to experiment errors and failures, until we find the right model for Timor-Leste. It is here that we rely on the collaboration from our friends in attendance, who have come from Spain, Portugal, France, Indonesia and Australia, so that we may share experiences, review and draft strategies seeking to develop the tourism sector, in particular community-based ecotourism.

There are no perfect and instantaneous formulas that we can import and apply to our Country, but I am confident that we already share the same basic principles that are vital for developing ecotourism in Timor-Leste:

- Respect for nature!
- Respect for rural communities!

- The direct involvement of our communities in this process! and
- The preservation of our natural, historical and cultural heritage!

Thank you very much!

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão

24 August 2009