



ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR
PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN TIMOR-LESTE

Hotel Timor, Díli

1 September 2009

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be here today, and to provide some opening remarks, at this seminar conducted by my friend Professor Sukehiro Hasegawa, on the accomplishments and challenges of Timor-Leste.

I would like to start by welcoming Professor Sukehiro Hasegawa back to our country. Professor Hasegawa is a good friend of Timor-Leste. He has been with us through both difficult times and as we set ourselves on the path to development.

As you are aware, he was appointed as the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Timor-Leste and Head of the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET) in May 2004, following his role as the Deputy Special Representative.

Prior to coming to Timor-Leste, Professor Hasegawa already had an outstanding career with the United Nations, working throughout the world, but with a focus on our region - the Asia Pacific.

I was honoured that he could be with us in Timor-Leste as we celebrated the 10th anniversary of our Popular Consultation.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It has been ten years since the Timorese People demonstrated tremendous courage in 1999, by voting overwhelmingly in favour of their right to national independence at the Popular Consultation.

As we celebrated over the weekend, we were reminding, however, of the great responsibility that we have to reconstruct our country and ensure lasting peace and prosperity.

We can be proud of our achievements so far. We are honouring the sacrifices of those that struggled, those that fought, and those that died, so that we as a people could be free.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Since the National Consultation, our country's history has been one of struggle and challenge as well as one of great hope and remarkable achievement.

We are now at an important stage in our nation's history - a stage where we enjoy peace, stability and democracy and are embarking on the path to national development.

We have left behind the conflicts of the past, and have a new sense of hope and dignity that can be seen and felt throughout the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Timorese have embraced democracy and political diversity.

We now have a political environment in which our people have come together with a sense of unity and common purpose. And we are enjoying the results.

In a truly extraordinary achievement, the 150,000 internally displaced persons have returned to their homes and their communities in just two years.

And we have a government committed to economic development. In 2008, Timor-Leste was the second fastest growing economy in the world with a growth rate of over 12%.

You only need to walk outside this hotel to see levels of economic activity that few could have dreamed of only two years ago.

And since 2007, the Government and National Parliament have committed to budgets which have done much to improve the services delivered to our people. This has included doubling our expenditure in vital areas such as health, education and agriculture.

And we are pursuing social justice with vigour and compassion and we have watched our veterans, the elderly and our infirm receive with pride their first pensions.

The government is also making important reforms to public administration. We are establishing a merit based and impartial civil service that operates under a framework of good governance.

These reforms include the establishment of a Civil Service Commission and the passage through the National Parliament of a law to establish an Anti-Corruption Commission.

And we proved, in our time of crisis after February 11, 2008, that our security sector could transcend past divides and cooperate with a new level of national pride and professionalism.

Ladies and Gentlemen

While we have come a long way in such a short period of time, we recognise that we still face many difficult challenges.

We recognise that while our people live in poverty; we can not truly be free.

We still, of course, remain one of the poorest countries in the world.

A 2008 World Bank study confirmed that between 2001 and 2007 poverty in Timor-Leste increased significantly, with half the Timorese population living below the basic needs poverty line.

Every day our people face a lack of food security, malnutrition, inadequate sanitation, high unemployment and extreme poverty.

And we face great challenges in improving the health and the education of our people.

Our country must also build its infrastructure so that we can take the road to development. This includes improving water and sanitation, power, communications, ports, housing and roads.

Ladies and gentlemen

The challenges our people face are difficult.

But the Timorese have faced greater challenges in the past. And we are determined, we are resourceful and we do not run from a struggle.

Just as the struggle to achieve our independence was difficult – our struggle to achieve true freedom through peace and prosperity will not be easy, and it will not happen overnight.

But with hope, and with courage, we will achieve our dreams and celebrate a better future for our people.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão

1st September 2009