

The Secretary of State for the Council of Ministers and Official Spokesperson for the Government of Timor-Leste Ágio Pereira



November 3, 2009
Dili, Timor-Leste

Government increases budget to strengthen gender equality

As part of its 2010 national priorities, the Government has close to doubled the budget for the Secretariat of State for the Promotion of Equality (SSPE), promoting and defending the rights of and opportunities for women in Timor-Leste.

Xanana Gusmão's Government was the first Government to establish and fund a body specifically to focus on empowering the role of women in Timorese society.

On June 4, 2008, the Council of Ministers approved Decree-Law no 16/2008, which established the Organic structure of the SSPE; thereby instituting the SSPE as a legal agency and as a central government body.

The SSPE has drafted a five year plan (2010-2015) responsible for advocacy, drafting and implementing key policy, overseeing vital legislation to protect women, and creating innovative programs across Government and civil society to provide education on gender related issues in all 13 districts of Timor-Leste.

On March 8, 2008 the joint statement known as the "Dili Commitment" was signed by the Government, the National Parliament, Civil Society and Churches in favour of gender equality. The "Dili Commitment" ensures all parties are dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women; a major advancement for the nation.

One of the major accomplishments was the drafting of the **Domestic Violence Law** which was approved on August 19, 2009 by the Council of Ministers and is now in the National Parliament. The SSPE is also actively contributing to the process of integrating a gender perspective in the **Penal Code**, particularly concerning the article defining Domestic Violence as a public crime as well as the **Civil Code**, concerning access to land and properties.

The 2010 Budget includes an allocation for the SSPE to provide financial support to all 13 districts to organize and celebrate the International Women's Day (8 March), the International Rural Women's Day (15 October) and the National Women's Day (3 November). These events are opportunities to raise community awareness in relation to the rights of women and to inform them about Government policies which have a positive impact in the lives of both women and men.

Starting in 2008, for the first time Xanana Gusmão's Government allocated funds to assist small women's groups that submitted their bids to create and / or develop economic activities. Fifty-five women's groups have benefited from this initiative. On 15 October, coinciding with International Rural Women's Day, a Fair day (FIAR) in both 2008 and 2009 was held to highlight the work done by rural women demonstrating their ability to contribute to the economic development of the country.

The SSPE has also signed a creative and innovative Memorandum of Understanding with TVTL (Timor Television) to use television and the media to promote gender equality through various programs including a rural cooking competition.

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Secretary of State Ágio Pereira noted “As a post conflict nation, we have many social and psychological obstacles to overcome, and as a Government it is our duty to legislate and support the most vital of rights.’

‘One of the most important is gender equality; for the daughters, for sisters, for wives of Timor-Leste. We as a Government are ensuring that attitudes and behaviors are changed to ensure gender equality for all future generations of women; providing equal opportunities and protection. These are their rights enshrined in the Constitution. The SSPE should be congratulated for the work achieved and the work planned for 2010 to empower, educate, advocate and uphold the values inherent in a democratic nation.”

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