



REPÚBLICA DEMOCRÁTICA DE TIMOR-LESTE
GABINETE DO PRIMEIRO-MINISTRO

SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR
DEFENCE AND SECURITY
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT THE HANDOVER CEREMONY OF THE TWO
PATROL BOATS CLASS JACO

11 June 2010

Díli Port

Excellency, President of the Republic, Dr. José Ramos-Horta

Excellency, President of the National Parliament, Fernando “Lasama” de Araújo

Excellency, President of the Court of Appeal, Dr. Cláudio Ximenes

Distinguished Members of the National Parliament

Distinguished Members of the Government

Excellency, Chief of the Armed Forces, Major General Taur Matan Ruak

Excellencies, Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished guests

Officers, Sergeants, Soldiers of F-FDTL,

Today, we write another special page in the recent History of our Homeland. The handover of the two Class Jaco patrol boats, purchased by us from the People’s Republic of China, represent the strong will of the Timorese people to guard their National Sovereignty and the resources of the Nation, gained by us through the sacrifices of the many Timorese who gave their lives in the defence of an ideal they believed in.

The Independence of a State entails possessing the necessary means to secure the territorial integrity and ongoing functioning of the Institutions, and therefore, this also entails, having the capacity to defend the People’s natural wealth.

It is in this endeavour, the acquisition of these patrol boats for marine protection represent a first step in the defence of our assets. This step is aimed, above all, to eliminate illegal fishing, which has caused Timor losses of around \$USD36 million each year from our greatly impoverished country.

Even very recently, during my visit to the sub-districts of the country, I witnessed in Uatukarbau a “Mother Boat”, which was accompanied by smaller boats, freely exploiting our waters without authorisation, and as such taking from our people what is rightfully theirs.

And back in March 2008, we received documented information that there were a large number of boats anchored along our coast, plundering our fish and irreversibly destroying our corals.

It was precisely for this reason that we decided that the People of Timor-Leste should not continue to have their precious resources stolen, and so the Government took the courageous decision to invest in the construction of two patrol boats.

This decision caused some public outcry, and above all, drew criticism from some countries, particularly Australia, which was greatly surprised at not having been consulted in this process.

Well...we cannot consider ourselves independent, if we were to derogate responsibility for the defence of our territorial and maritime borders or responsibility for guaranteeing the security of our People and their resources.

We cannot consider ourselves a sovereign Country if every time we are to make a fundamental decision, we have to consult our neighbouring, friendly and partner countries!

Even I was, at various times, besieged by individuals who questioned the legitimacy of the purchase of these patrol boats from the People's Republic of China. I answered then, as I do now, with the same response: "This is a very simple problem. As simple as making a business decision, a decision that benefits Timor-Leste".

Ladies and gentlemen,

A Country with a mere 8 years of Independence, which is still fragile in the defence of its integrity and its sovereignty, expects that other countries to understand that we have a fundamental concern to guarantee better living conditions for our People and not to cause regional instabilities.

And let me tell you, all that has recently occurred in Timor-Leste was caused by external factors, and not internal. Therefore, what we ask of you is to respect the sovereignty and integrity that we achieved through our own resistance.

For this reason, from the very beginning, we made a point of fighting for our right to possess our own Armed Forces. Despite the protests against this legitimate aspiration,

lead by institutions and donor countries, who tried to convince us of the futility of this objective, we succeeded in this course.

At that time, some even argued that the existence of a military body could put the democracy and freedom of the People at risk - as if all the countries of the world, including the more stable and advanced democracies, did not have their own Armed Forces!

And so, once the project of establishing a Defence Force of Timor-Leste, which integrated a significant part of the FALINTIL cadres, was realised, it became necessary to consider the defence of our maritime border and the immeasurable wealth of our coast.

For the F-FDTL, the future is the Timor Sea. Not that our sea is greater than that of our surrounding countries, on the contrary, we ended up attaining a small portion of the maritime waters that circle us. But, it belongs to us and, therefore, it falls on us to look after it!

Officers, Sergeants and Soldiers of F-FDTL,

As Minister of Defence and Security, I will do everything to protect the sovereignty of Timor-Leste, respecting, of course, our complex geopolitical context.

We know, and we will always know, to be friends with our friends, respecting their interests, so long as our own interests are not at stake. The main intention of the Naval Component is not to be a navy, but to represent a component of the new paradigm of the Defence Forces of Timor-Leste.

Everyone knows that the well-being of the people comes from the security and stability of the Country. Security and stability of a country also mean the defence of its waters and of its natural resources.

Therefore, the reinforcement of the Naval Component of F-FDTL represents a strategic objective that no Government, independently of its political orientation, can disregard.

The naval resources that Timor-Leste has at its disposal are obviously inadequate in fulfilling the tasks commonly attributed to a Military Institution. But, nevertheless, the Government has the patriotic and sovereign obligation to provide the Nation with well equipped boats to patrol the entire exclusive economic zone.

In 2001, while still under the United Nations administration, we accepted two Class Oe-cusse boats, generously offered by Portugal as part of the bilateral cooperation program. These were fundamental to the establishment of the Naval Component and to build the capacity of our sailors, at a time when we did not have the financial resources that would allow us to even consider other alternatives.

But times have changed. The Timorese State must assume, using its own budget, the duty of modernizing its Armed Forces, and equipping them properly.

Naturally we will continue to need support in terms of transfer of skills and knowledge. We cannot presume to know everything and that we do not need help from anyone. But we must also be autonomous in the options we choose in regard to the strategic defence of the Homeland and the preservation of our natural resources.

I foresee, as Minister of Defence and Security that the two patrol boats cannot operate effectively on their own. The Government should also begin to provide PNTL, Migration and Fire services, all the capacities to effectively execute their duties in protecting lives and resources on the high sea.

We will have to strengthen the capacity of the F-FDTL Naval Component and to act in an integrated manner and in cooperation with various institutions, if we want to fully guarantee that our coast does not regularly become subject to illegal activities, such as illegal fishing and the trafficking of drugs, humans and contraband, among other things.

As Head of Government and responsible for the Defence portfolio, I can guarantee to you that I will not stand idly by and that we will continue to provide our Armed Forces, and in particular its Naval Component, the means that are absolutely necessary for it to

fully carry out its mission, provided for under the Constitution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I cannot end without thanking the People's Republic of China for all its support, particularly for the technical training in China of 36 sailors who will staff the two patrol boats. I would also like to thank the PRC for sending instructors to Timor-Leste to continue training our military who will operate the boats that will be officially handed over today.

I would also like to address a few words of profound appreciation to the Defence Ministers of Australia and Indonesia, through their respective Ambassadors that are here today, for providing their navy boats to participate in this ceremony.

The presence of the navy of these two countries, foresees a long period of cooperation between our three countries within the desired spirit of strengthening security of our waters and contributing to world peace.

To the F-FDTL members, integrated in the Naval Component, I encourage you to dedicate all your efforts and knowledge to the patriotic mission which today you have been entrusted: to guarantee the inviolability of our territorial waters, the preservation of our maritime resources and to impede the practice of criminal activities along our coast.

What the Homeland demands of us is to fulfil the first of the obligations of all who choose a military career as a way of life: the bold defence of national sovereignty.

I am certain that you will not disappoint and that you will be a source of pride for all Timorese.

Thank you very much.