

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



June 29, 2010
Díli, Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste congratulates Maria Helena Pires on her election to the CEDAW Committee.

The Government of Timor-Leste is proud to announce that on June 28, in New York, Maria Helena Pires was elected as one of 23 experts to serve on the committee of CEDAW, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Twelve experts were elected to replace outgoing members with Ms. Pires due to begin her four-year term on the 1st of January 2011. The committee, established in 1982, monitors the progress made for women in the 186 countries that have ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Ms. Pires has had an active role in women's empowerment, governance and development in Timor-Leste. She is currently the Senior Policy Advisor to the Vice Prime Minister and the Coordinator for Management and Administrative Affairs of State. Prior to this she had wide-ranging experience working with government and civil society on improving women's access to justice, health and political participation. She was engaged as Timor-Leste's UNIFEM Country Program Coordinator as well as the founding member of the Timor-Leste's Women's Network (REDE), a role in which she developed a unique expertise in the development of women in rural settings.

Since the restoration of independence in 2002, Timor-Leste has made positive progress towards ensuring gender equality. The CEDAW Convention was ratified by Timor-Leste in April 2003 and the Government of Timor-Leste went on to present its' CEDAW Initial Report in 2009 in New York. For a nascent nation, Timor-Leste has already included as part of its Government the Office of the Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality (SSPE) established by decree Law in 2008 with a mandate to strengthen women's rights and gender equality.

Significant steps include the signing of the Díli Declaration on March 8 2008 by the Government, the National Parliament, civil society and churches in favor of gender equality, the appointment of Gender Focal Points now institutionalized at ministry and district level, the establishment of coordination mechanisms and the passing of Timor-Leste's first Domestic Violence law in May of this year with access under law to emergency medical help, shelter, psycho-social and legal support services.

The election of Ms. Pires to the CEDAW Committee adds another opportunity for Timor-Leste to have a voice on the international stage with the ability to offer a Timorese perspective and at the same time to tap into global expertise in women's rights.

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Government spokesperson Ágio Pereira noted "Ms. Pires is one of many strong and independent women who are groundbreaking leaders in Timor-Leste, highly motivated and dedicated to serving the people. We extend our warmest congratulations on her new role and express our great appreciation for all she has achieved to date in contributing towards tangible change for our nation." **ENDS**

For More Information Please Contact:

Ágio Pereira +670 723 0011

E-mail:

agiopereira@cdm.gov.tl

or

govtlmedia@gmail.com

Website:

www.timor-leste.gov.tl