



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY

HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO

ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEDICATION OF THE MATERNITY

SCHOOL OF OUR LADY OF FÁTIMA

3 August 2010

Fatumeta, Dili

Your Excellency the Bishop of Dili, Bishop Alberto Ricardo da Silva,

Your Excellency the Senior Vicar of the Diocese of Dili, Reverend Father Apolinário Maria Aparício Guterres,

Your Excellency the Portuguese Ambassador, Mr Luís Barreira de Sousa,

Your Excellency the Minister of Health, Dr Nelson Martins,

Your Excellency the CEO of the Inan Timor Foundation, Reverend Father Guilhermino da Silva,

Your Excellency the Director of the Maternity School of Our Lady of Fatima, Ms Virna Martins-Sam,

Illustrious guests,

My first words are of thanks for the generous invitation that I received to be here at this ceremony, which is so symbolic. This maternity school is a remarkable achievement, and it would not have been possible without the priceless work done by the Catholic Church.

Your Excellency the Bishop of Dili,

To all those who have had an active participation in the construction of this maternity school, particularly the Diocese of Dili, which will now be responsible for managing it through the Inan Timor Foundation, the Portuguese-created Mater Timor Foundation, which funded the construction of the building, and ENSUL, which was responsible for the work, I offer my heartfelt congratulations.

The idea for this project that has now come true came a decade ago, when the then Holy Father Pope John Paul II urged the Church to play a more active role in the defence of life.

The Portuguese Episcopal Conference then decided to build a maternity school in Dili, in order to reduce child mortality. The Mater Timor Foundation was created to make that goal true, with the help of a fundraising event.

The construction of the infrastructures, priced at one million euros, took place from

2005 to December 2009. On the latter date the infrastructures were handed over to the Diocese of Dili, which then became responsible for continuing the project.

Your Excellency the Portuguese Ambassador, I would like to convey to you my deepest appreciation for the noble gesture by your fellow citizens, and ask you to give my thanks to the relevant parties in Portugal.

Timor-Leste is a young Nation that is still being built and where almost everything is yet to be done. As such, it requires the effort and dedication of all its children, which can never be too much.

The Country has one of the highest birth rates in the world, meaning that about two thirds of the Timorese population have not yet reached adulthood.

As such, the State has the obligation to create every condition to enable our children to be born in an environment that allows them not only to survive, but also to receive at birth the vital assistance that will ensure they will grow healthy.

The Declaration on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1959, sets in Principle 4 that children have the right to be born and raised healthy, meaning that both children and their mothers are entitled to special care and protection, including pre and post-birth care.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, also adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989 and ratified by our National Parliament in July 2003, states in its preamble that children require special protection and care, namely in terms of proper legal protection, both during and after birth.

Aware of the responsibility by the Timorese State in complying with and enforcing these principles, and aware that child mortality, although considerably reduced in these past few years, is still a nightmare that must be eradicated urgently, the Government has spared no effort to provide medical care to babies and their mothers, both after the births and during pregnancies.

This task should not be exclusive to the State, but rather should belong to everyone, particularly to the relevant agencies which are part of our patrimony.

The Catholic Church, due to the essential role it plays in our society resulting from its historical past and the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Timorese population is

Catholic, has an increased duty in this area, which it has been meeting with a high sense of responsibility.

And it is exactly because the State has the obligation to ensure to our children the social protection they require to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal way, in conditions of liberty and dignity, as set in Principle 2 of the said Declaration on the Rights of the Child, that the Government, among other measures, took the decision to provide each Diocese in Timor-Leste with an annual public grant.

This is a grant that the Dioceses manage according to their needs and to the principles and priorities they set, being meant for all activities leading to the dignifying of the Human Person, under the guiding values of Christian morals.

The Diocese of Dili has decided to use part of that grant to acquire the necessary equipment to enable the maternity school of Our Lady of Fátima to be fully operational, as well as to meet maintenance costs.

This is a priceless value provided to the community, allowing many mothers to give birth surrounded by every medical care and type of assistance, not only during labour but also through regular consultations during pregnancy. In the cases where pregnancies are considered to be risky, women may even be interned in the maternity school.

I trust that with this initiative, as well as with other similar projects already ongoing or to be achieved in a near future, child mortality will drop dramatically. This is another factor that shows that Timor-Leste is well on the path towards progress and development.

To all the doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff who will be bringing this maternity school to life, I trust that you will perform your duties with great professionalism and dedication, so as to enable the success of this venture, which was made possible because of a few, but now belongs to every Timorese.

Thank you very much!

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão

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