



**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE**

**OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**

**ADDRESS**

**BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE**

**KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE  
CONFERENCE**

**“10 YEARS ON: THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL  
PROGRAMMES TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE  
SOCIAL STATE IN TIMOR-LESTE”**

**Dili**

**16 February 2012**

Your Excellencies  
Illustrious Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, I must congratulate the Minister of Social Solidarity and her team for their excellent initiative in organising this Conference on the contribution of social programmes to the construction of a Social State. This is a very important topic for Timor-Leste.

It was a relatively short time ago that we gained our National Sovereignty and Independence. It was only twelve years ago that we closed a tragic chapter in our history in which many lives were lost and our society was left with deep scars.

Despite having affirmed the dignity and spirit of the Timorese, the period of war we endured in the recent past left many widows, orphans and disabled, as well as many veterans and elderly people who dedicated their lives to the cause of national liberation. They are disadvantaged today because they didn't have the chance to fight to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

It is exactly because of this that Timor-Leste could never, under any circumstance, create a State other than a Social State!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this last decade, and despite the heavy burden we inherited, starting without basic infrastructure, skilled human resources, financial resources of our own, democratic institutions or even any institutional memory, we have succeeded in creating a Democratic State and consolidating the Timorese Nation!

Only ten years on, we can be proud of the considerable progress we have made on many fronts – political, social, economic and diplomatic. Despite some serious failures and setbacks, throughout this Statebuilding phase we never turned down a challenge, we never stopped trying to do more. Little by little, and with great resilience, we have been learning and growing as a Nation.

We have learned from our People that difficult times must be overcome with cohesion, getting all parties – State, Church, NGOs, private sector and Civil Society – involved. Essential to building a Social State in Timor-Leste is

democratic participation, so that we may find ways to build social inclusion and protect our most vulnerable citizens.

In pursuing the national development mission, the Government gives priority to social protection policies.

As we grow economically, thanks in part to our natural resource reserves, we must distribute our wealth to those who need it the most.

This is about giving dignity to those who gave us freedom.

This is about protecting Timorese families still living in borderline poverty.

This is about responding to humanitarian emergency situations, as we also have to face the effects of global climate change or, as it unfortunately happened in 2006, having just left behind a post-conflict situation, we had to adopt a policy of recovery on a grand scale.

The social protection programmes implemented by the Ministry of Social Solidarity have been vital in achieving these goals.

In this still early stage of Country building, our social programmes have mitigated extreme poverty for a fragile sector of our population and protected those most vulnerable. In a rather modest way, they have also contributed to nurturing the economy, as supporting households creates possibilities of entrepreneurship which has led to many small businesses being formed throughout the Country.

Your Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to build a true Social State, we must further strengthen the Government's pro-poor policies. Not only by continuing to provide social support to those most vulnerable, particularly the elderly, women, children at risk, the disabled but also by creating a sound basis for Social Protection, attuned to our demographic, economic and administrative, legal, social and cultural reality.

In order to enable this we are developing a proper legal basis and efficient mechanisms where Timorese citizens are held accountable but where

they are also provided with different options. Here we must take into account the sustainability of the system, as we have to foresee medium and long-term impacts.

We believe that building a Social State, a State that values citizenship, is not transforming our society into two classes: one of beggars and another of taxpayers!

The Social State is not a charity State but rather a State that takes action in society, by developing social protection systems to ensure individual protection. At the same time, it creates the necessary conditions for the poorest citizens to free themselves from poverty with dignity.

This requires a thorough joint assessment of the possible solutions for social inequality, as well as direct involvement by people in need, to try and find a way out of poverty. These people must be involved in choosing the paths they will take towards prosperity, with a participative and responsible attitude toward living in society.

The participation and contribution by all against the tragedy of poverty are the cornerstones of a democratic culture. Only with collective accountability and a sense of citizenship can we develop our Country in economic, social and human terms.

I believe that the general principles that Timor-Leste intends to follow are basic and universal:

- Access to social protection by all citizens;
- Equality and non-discrimination;
- Equity, that is ensuring equal treatment in like situations and different treatment in dissimilar situations;
- Balance in policies developed by the State and in actions carried out together with Civil Society;
- And lastly social inclusion, fighting the causes of marginalization and social exclusion and promoting the ability of people to have socially active lives.

As for this last item, we must start paying more attention to our youngsters who, due to a legacy of violence and distrust, may not yet have embraced the genuine values of citizenship. Additionally, because they are

already facing the adversities of unemployment and idleness, youngsters may easily become at risk.

This is why I say that the creation of a Social State is a rather complex issue. Social policies must be strategically linked to other sector development policies.

Your Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I trust that this Conference will provide us with feasible solutions for creating a Social State. I urge you to reflect on the most adequate ways to arrive at these solutions, as well as to better assess and apply lessons learned and to refrain from repeating errors of the past. This will be important so that we can strengthen existing programmes and draft new ones.

In the 2011-2030 Strategic Development Plan we designed some strategies and actions for the future, recognizing that: “The true wealth of any Nation is the strength of its people. Maximizing the overall health, education and living quality of the Timorese people is essential to have a fair and developed Nation”. This is what I consider to be the definition of a Social State, and this is the vision that I have, and I believe all of you have, for Timor-Leste.

This commitment creates many financial, social and cultural challenges; however, we all know that one aspect of a strong, cohesive and progressive Nation is the ability to protect the rights and interests of its most vulnerable citizens.

To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, I must thank those who have come from afar to take part in this conference and to contribute to the development of a Social Protection System that is fair and adequate for our society.

Regarding international solidarity, we have been fortunate to be able to rely on the selfless assistance of several countries and citizens from around the world. As the recipient of international donations for these past ten years, we have an even greater obligation to implement truly effective systems in Timor-Leste that ensure social protection and support the development of Timorese citizens.

If we fail in providing better living conditions for all Timorese citizens, we will have failed in our Independence ideal.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão  
16 February 2012