



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING SESSION OF THE
ICAPP-CAPDI JOINT CONFERENCE ON PEACE AND
RECONCILIATION IN ASIA**

25 April 2012

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Your Excellency the President-Elect, Taur Matan Ruak

Your Excellency Jose de Venecia, Founding Chairman of ICAPP and Founding President of CAPDI

Your Excellency Sok An, Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia, Senior Vice President of CAPDI and Member of the ICAPP Standing Committee

Your Excellency Chung Eui-young, Co-Chairman of the Standing Committee and Secretary General of ICAPP

Your Excellencies

Heads of Delegation

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Members of Parliament

Government Colleagues

Dear Representatives from Civil Society and International Agencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear friends,

First and foremost, on behalf of the Government, I would like to thank all those in attendance for choosing Timor-Leste as the host country for this Conference on such an important subject in the modern world: peace and reconciliation!

Having completed a week ago a two-round presidential election, which took place in accordance with democratic principles, our people salute all of you who have come from so many countries!

It is with great satisfaction that Timor-Leste takes part in the organisation of this ICAPP-CAPDI Joint Conference on Peace and Reconciliation in Asia.

We are all looking for something; we are all trying to assess the needs of modern times and trying to find our true role in this period of great challenges.

Your Excellencies,

For Timor-Leste, which this year is celebrating its 10th Anniversary as an independent country, this is a historical moment.

Allow me to speak for a while on what the Timorese people have endured. Much has already been said and written regarding our struggle for self-determination and independence.

Since 1975, in view of the unique nature of our struggle, being a half island cut off from any external logistical support, it was of the utmost importance to unite the Timorese, who had been divided by a civil war prior to the Indonesian invasion. It was this colossal effort by the people themselves that gave them the ability to reconcile and to forgive.

In this process we gained the support of the undecided and we ensured the return of the people who were in favour of integration within Indonesia, who worked for the Indonesian administration or who were part of the paramilitary and military groups created by the occupying authorities. We had to reconcile and forgive, in order to attain a higher goal – independence.

The struggle was too long for our size and our means; however the Timorese people nurtured the longing to live in peace. And peace meant more than just the end of war.

The Referendum in August 1999 put an end to the occupation struggle, but generated yet more death and destruction.

There was not a single Timorese citizen who did not have at least one traumatic experience. There were still many open wounds that did not have time to heal and many feelings that were hard to let go. However, the greatness of our People's character is in their tolerance and in their deep yearning to live in harmony.

And for the Timorese people, peace meant living free from hatred, revenge and distrust. Peace meant living in harmony with our enemies, and especially with ourselves, both individually and as a whole.

The character of the Timorese People was forged in this desire to live in peace.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is why the reconciliation processes in Timor-Leste were so successful. We understood from the experiences of other post-conflict countries that if we were to keep hatred and mistrust alive in our society, we would not be able to build our Nation.

We established CAVR (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation) in order to ascertain the truth regarding the violence by Timorese against Timorese, particularly during the civil war period, as well as to be able to handle that truth.

The reconciliation meetings between Timorese citizens, held in 2000, throughout the border with Indonesia, were truly moving, not only because of the description and acknowledgement of the atrocities committed between perpetrators and victims, but particularly because of the latter's ability to forgive. Consequently, thousands of refugees who had fled to Indonesia and who feared for their acceptance in an independent Timor-Leste, returned and were welcomed by their brothers and sisters.

And this was the first key step in terms of our Nation building!

Our ancestral tradition of reconciliation through dialogue was immensely important in this critical process of rebuilding the country. This process requires the participation by everyone, as well as a common vision concerning the future.

We also let bygones be bygones with our Indonesian neighbours, thereby enabling reconciliation between our peoples. The offences of the past were assessed and, with great courage, particularly by the victims, we began a process of cooperation and friendship between Timor-Leste and Indonesia – a process that has been very important for the development of Timor-Leste.

With the creation of a Commission of Truth and Friendship in Bali, in a joint effort between Timor-Leste and Indonesia, we were able to further strengthen this friendship and to contribute to peace in Southeast Asia. I believe that our common history and the difficult processes we endured and overcame can serve as examples for peace and reconciliation in the region and in the world.

Presently, Indonesia is not only a close and cooperative neighbour, but also an example of stability, democracy and economic growth that Timor-Leste is following and studying closely.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

People develop when they succeed in overcoming their own weaknesses.

And Timor-Leste is no exception. After the exultation of freedom and independence, Timor-Leste was left entangled in a web of internal conflicts. We had disturbances in December 2002, February 2004, March 2006 and February 2008, and it seemed as if we were doomed to a vicious cycle of conflicts every two years.

We had to do some soul-searching and conclude that we had failed in assessing the root causes of problems and that our State's institutions were still very weak. We had had to build our State from scratch.

When my Government entered into office in August 2007, we decided that the priority was to carry out reforms in order to reduce our institutional weaknesses, to restore peace and to ensure, once again, reconciliation among the Timorese.

It is precisely in this spirit of reconciliation and unity that we have been working in order to develop our Nation. In 2009, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the restoration of our freedom, we launched the motto: 'Goodbye Conflict, Welcome Development'.

We also know that without economic growth and without providing education, health and proper living conditions to our people, our mission of living in peace would never be achieved.

The misery in which a great part of the Timorese population still lives does not bring peace of mind to any Timorese citizen. Our struggle for peace is not yet over, and it will not be over while there are people living in poverty in our country. Nevertheless, this struggle will be easier if we all work together towards the common good.

When building a State and Nation there is no room for nurturing past hatreds.

The building process must be shared by all, in dialogue and with mutual understanding. All sovereign bodies, the entire civil society and all citizens must be involved in this process and share in the same spirit.

Further, the commitment by society increases as social and economic conditions present significant improvements in people's lives. We also believe that if stability and safety are ensured the economic and social indicators will be more positive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Humankind is living in complex times, where science and technology have evolved tremendously, with catastrophic effects throughout the globe, while the mindsets and actions of human beings are increasingly uncontrollable.

I have participated four times in the Democracy Forum in Bali, a broad initiative of my good friend Dr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the President of the Republic of Indonesia. Every year there are more countries taking part to have honest discussions in relation to their problems, their pasts, their present, and their future that they aspire to achieve.

In the last month of March I took part in the International Dialogue on Defence, in Jakarta for the second time.

While in Bali the universal values of democracy were discussed in relation to their intrinsic connection to development. In Jakarta, under the perspective of State sovereignty and security, I raised the approach that we need to look at the actual causes of the problems in the world.

The world is living in difficult times. It has become commonplace to say that the world is changing. And these changes concern respect for human rights and respect for free speech.

But what changes can we actually consider at the start of this new millennium?

A few of us here today at this Conference belong to the generation immediately after World War II. In the second half of last century there was also an extraordinary change in the global mapping of countries, from colonised territories to independent countries, putting a more or less permanent end to colonial wars and the consequent extermination of the native populations.

The cold war and the inevitability of ideological and economic control divided the world into two factions, namely socialism and capitalism.

The superpowers exchanged threats of destruction, while protecting and assisting their respective alliances. There was an atmosphere of relative stability throughout the world, despite a few instances of conflict in the struggle for freedom.

Newly independent countries were blessed by their former colonisers if they allowed their wealth to be exploited in exchange for despotic regimes, merely to ensure that communism was kept at bay.

After the reform in the former Soviet Union, what did we see? We saw that the end of the cold war presented a new equation to the world's decision makers.

The international community started waving the banner of human rights, the banner of democracy, the banner of retributive justice.

Former despotic and corrupt allies started to be overthrown one way or another. The world began taking its first steps towards change, although hypocrisy still prevailed in the political chessboard of influences and decisions.

And this political hypocrisy of the Western world led to feelings of dissatisfaction, rebellion, confrontation, hatred and revenge, which were translated into the radical and extremist actions we now call terrorism.

There ceased to be room for dialogue and time to listen and to talk. Today, some countries seek to impose their interest on others that are weaker and more vulnerable. Today there is a prevailing sense of supremacy of values, which are breached in the very countries that impose them onto others. In the Democracy Forum of Bali, the motto was 'every country has its own reality, with its own internal factors' and that there could no longer be a 'one size fits all' policy, as it is highly damaging. Let the peoples decide to have change and help them achieve that change without resorting to violence.

Today they want to make peace by waging wars and imposing democracy by fighting in conflicts, forgetting that armed conflicts only cause disunity within countries, increase people's suffering and pushes people to seek revenge.

After 10 years of war in Iraq, what do we have? We have self-destruction by the Iraqi people. The same is happening in Afghanistan.

The 'Arab Spring' was a successive photocopy of events, where citizens from each country were pushed to kill one another. Arab peoples were led to believe that the power of television can change everything which did not prove true. Fear, hatred and the desire for revenge, both at the personal and group levels, will prevail until such a time when there is full participation by all parts of society. The 'Arab Spring' started in Tunisia, and the atmosphere of stability that enables the intended reforms is evidence of the political maturity of the Tunisian people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste is not alone in its desire for reconciliation and peace.

At this time the economic growth of ASEAN together with the growth of China and India and the enduring strength of Japan and the Republic of Korea make this the Asian Century. We see in this region a steadfast desire to preserve peace, despite the perception that in some places there is also the typical defensive position of someone preparing for war, as a result of the real threats of today's world, to which this area of the globe is not immune.

We know that the individual desire of the human being is to live in peace, free from oppression and with respect for the most basic human rights. The international dialogue and the multilateral actions by world leaders must be tireless in seeking to achieve this goal.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude I would like to say that Timor-Leste co-chairs the International Dialogue on 'Peacebuilding and Statebuilding'. The first meeting of this body took place in Dili, in 2010, while the second one took place in Monrovia, Liberia, in 2011.

Along with this International Dialogue, the 'g7+' forum is also a space where fragile States can share experiences and talk to one another. This dialogue has enabled the group to speak as one to the international community, so as to try building States, democracies and peace.

Today the Group covers 19 countries representing over 350 million people, from Africa and Asia to the Pacific. In the Caribbean, Haiti has already stated its willingness to join and to hold a Conference.

For Timor-Leste, the leadership and institutionalisation of the 'g7+' as a permanent forum is a process we approach with responsibility and pride. As a small and young Nation, being able to take part in the consolidation of this group and to give a voice to States that by themselves would not be heard is to give expression to the desire for peace and democracy in the world. As such, in November 2011 the group took a very important document to Busan, which we called the 'New Deal'. This document is presently being reviewed in the United Nations by the Secretary-General himself.

What is more, ladies and gentlemen, we can never forget our responsibilities in terms of consolidating peace in the world. This is even more so for Timor-Leste, as we received international assistance when building a democratic and pluralistic State, and this has enabled our society to live in peace and freedom.

We can never forget that while we are here talking about peace and reconciliation there are less fortunate people dying in several parts of the world as a result of wars and violence.

We are following the situation in Guinea-Bissau, a member of the 'g7+', with deep sadness. The group had agreed to hold a Conference in that country, which is so dear to us, on May 24th, but unfortunately we had to cancel it.

We are also rather apprehensive in relation to the conflict between Sudan and Southern Sudan, the latter being a member of the 'g7+' as well.

It is very important that this meeting produces conclusions that can be used by the community of nations in the search for responses to the conflicts that separate individuals inside their very countries.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão
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