



PRIME
MINISTER

**ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT THE RECEPTION TO LAUNCH THE UNITED
NATIONS SECRETARY GENERAL'S
EDUCATION FIRST INITIATIVE**

New York
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Palácio do Governo,
Avenida Presidente Nicolau Lobato,
Dili, Timor-Leste

The Right Honourable Gordon Brown, Special Envoy for Education
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here for the official launch of the 'Education First Initiative'.

Just last month, Timor-Leste had the honour of hosting a visit from the Secretary General, His Excellency, Ban Ki-moon, his Special Envoy for Education, the Right Honourable Gordon Brown and the Director General of UNESCO, Mrs. Irina Borkova.

During their visit, the Education First initiative was first publicly announced.

The initiative aims to improve the quality of education, ensure every child has equal access to learning.

It provides a simple, targeted and effective framework to improve education across the globe; and to support the achievement of the Millennium Challenge Goals.

Education not only changes the lives of people - it drives the future of nations.

East Asia is becoming the world's economic powerhouse, largely because countries such as China, South Korea, Singapore and Australia have focused on education.

Regrettably, in the Least Developed Nations, and in particular in fragile and conflict affected nations, many children have no access to education.

Children in conflict-affected poor countries make up 42% of children out of school.

This inequality puts at risk social cohesion – making it is more important than ever that every child gets the benefit of a quality education.

Fortunately, this is exactly what Education First aims to achieve.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Timor-Leste has successfully emerged from conflict. We have secured peace, and are now focused on building a strong economy to provide a future for our people.

But while our country is full of promise, we still face many challenges.

Many of our people still live in extreme poverty. Unemployment is high, and our infrastructure, our roads, schools and hospitals require major investment.

Timor-Leste is also a young country with a young population. Over half of our population is under the age of 19. This means that more than 500,000 are under the age of 19.

When I was a child, less than 4000 Timorese went to school each year. And I could only complete secondary school. Today, Timor-Leste already has a few institutions of higher education. And today 90 per cent of children enter primary school. This is a great improvement but we need to see 100 per cent of children in primary school, given that regrettably more than 50 per cent drop out.

We need to build more classrooms, especially in remote and marginalised areas, so we can provide all children with a safe and happy learning environment.

It is not good enough that many have to walk hours each day, to an overcrowded class room, without appropriate books and curriculum.

And in some schools, students do not understand the language being spoken by the teachers.

We are working hard to address these challenges.

We are training more teachers, and providing more books and learning materials.

We are focusing on equality of opportunity to make sure that our girls get a fair go.

And we are looking to make sure young children are taught in a language they can understand so that language is not a barrier to education.

We are determined to give our young people the chance of a better future.

We are installing fibre optic network across the country, which at an opportune time will help us to introduce early education, facilitating a more productive and quality education.

We are also hoping to organize an “Education First” Mini-Summit in Dili in November, with a view to learning from the experiences of nations such as Finland, South Korea and Cambodia, in achieving significant and rapid progress in education systems, quality and equality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to give thanks to His Excellency, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, for promoting the Education First initiative.

Timor-Leste looks forward to working in partnership with the United Nations to give our children the opportunity, the hope, and the promise provided by a quality education.

Thank you very much.