



**P R I M E
M I N I S T E R**

**ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Dili, 28 May 2013



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

Your Excellency
The Speaker of Parliament
Your Excellencies
The Members of Parliament
Your Excellency
Mrs Isabel Ferreira, First Lady of Timor-Leste

Fellow Government Members,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate Commission A of the National Parliament, along with the Ministry of State Administration, for organizing this International Conference that will enable us to learn from other countries regarding this debate that is so important to the strengthening of our Governance.

I would like to thank those in attendance, namely the distinguished guests from Portugal, Cape Verde, Australia and Indonesia, who are here today to share with us their experiences on local government. We are very pleased to host you in this new meeting gathering Nations from these two regions – CPLP and Asia-Pacific – between which Timor-Leste is proud to establish bridges of dialogue and cooperation.

Learning from your experiences will enable us to choose carefully the model of local government that we want for our country. The most important aspect for this model is to be adequate to the Timorese reality, our ancient traditions, our history and our communities. However, learning about your decentralization experiences will surely make our decision-making process more informed and consequently more effective.

I must also extend my very personal gratitude to the Portuguese mayors that have provided unconditional support to our effort. I would like to make a special reference to my friend Mr António Rodrigues, the Mayor of Torres Novas, who has just issued a book on this subject.

Following the support by the Portuguese mayors, we had the idea to establish a special status of fraternity between Portuguese cities and some Timorese villages. Cooperation ties were established between some of those, through the process of twinning. For instance, Dili is twinned with Coimbra, which is a landmark of Portuguese history, culture and academics. Being twinned cities, they have been establishing ties of solidarity and friendship that bridge the oceans and continents that separate us, made even stronger by our mutual language and history.

In order to strengthen the special relationship with Portuguese cities, on 21 March 2013, in Lisbon, we signed a Protocol of Cooperation with 26 Portuguese municipalities, which vowed, in pairs, to support the creation of each of the 13

Municipalities of Timor-Leste. As such, I would like to give a special salute to the representative of the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities, without which this Protocol would not have been possible.

Lastly, I would like to address the multilateral development partners in attendance here today, who want to accompany Timor-Leste in yet another step towards democratic consolidation.

I welcome you all to this debate which is so important for the future of Timor-Leste.

We know where we want to be within a few decades. We know the country we want to become. The Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030 has a clear vision for Timor-Leste. It sets a path that will transform us into a medium-high income country within 20 years, with a society that is more prosperous, socially and politically stable, educated and healthy. We want poverty reduction, through the diversification of the economy and the capacity building of our professionals, to transform the profile of Timor-Leste. We want this transformation to reach every Suco, every Village, every family.

Only then will we be able to say that our State rebuilding process is truly consolidated. Only then will we know that we have fully disseminated the peace dividends to every Timorese citizen who fought for 24 years so that Timor-Leste could become democratic and independent.

During these eleven years as an independent Nation, which we have just completed this May, we have made remarkable achievements. There have been obstacles in our path, but we have managed to overcome every one of them and become stronger as a Nation in the process.

Today we are living in a time of political stability and peace, which would not have been possible without a spirit of reconciliation and understanding. We have a fully functional Democratic State under the Rule of Law, with independent, strong and efficient Sovereignty Bodies. The vital foundations of our Democracy are sound. Since 1999 the Timorese people have displayed a unique democratic enthusiasm, with an extraordinary level of electoral participation.

Democracy cannot be limited to the right to vote, although the right to vote is a cornerstone principle of democracy. Elections are fundamental moments for democratic States, and in 2012 – with the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections – we saw how they strengthen the very basis of democratic architecture. However, the participation by citizens cannot be limited to polling. There has to be a more daily participation, so that every Timorese citizen may have a say regarding the actual decisions that influence their lives.

During these last few weeks of popular consultation in the Districts, I saw that this willingness to be responsible for the direction their country takes is deeply imbedded in the spirit of the Timorese people. The involvement by the Timorese in this consultation shows us that we are on the right path and that we must extend the political debate to every citizen in every part of the country. We must create institutional mechanisms that bring the Government closer to its population, particularly in the more remote rural areas.

Reducing the distance that still exists today will make it easier for the Timorese to be heard and for the State to perform its duties efficiently, namely as a provider of public services, since these services will be better suited to the specific needs of each community.

If decentralization will enable the State to be closer to the Timorese, then reflecting on aspects of how and when will be essential.

We know that if we want to have an efficient governance apparatus the model that we choose must be functional and not too costly or bureaucratic. It should prevent overlapping between local government and national government, setting clear boundaries between the responsible and competences of each type of government.

We must find an adequate model of local government that is compatible with our community traditions, since these are the cornerstone of our living as a Nation.

It was in order to answer these questions that we started the discussion with the popular consultation. As you know, the process is still ongoing. During this mandate we want to establish the 13 Municipality Installation Committees. Furthermore, by 2017 we want to create 3 out of the 5 Municipalities.

I would like to remind that this commitment towards administrative decentralization was also a concern of the previous governments. This was not something that started with the Fifth Constitutional Government or even with its predecessor. This debate had started before and sought, like today, to honour the Constitution.

The Local Development Programme, started in 2004, was a first approximation to the local government models, experimenting administrative decentralization levels in

each district of Timor-Leste. That Programme created 25 local assemblies, provided with administrative support and seeking to develop some small infrastructure projects.

As such, today we are better prepared to resume this reflection, since we can build on what has been done before and learn important lessons from it.

I also believe that this Conference will improve our debate, since we will be taking a look at the decentralization experiences in countries so different as Portugal and Indonesia, and Cape Verde and Australia. In every country, the selected model had to take into account the historical and traditional features in existence.

Your Excellencies,

The people of Timor-Leste know their country well. We are very familiar with our mountains, our coastline and the Sea that bathes us.

Approximately three quarters of our population reside in rural areas, often in remote locations where access is difficult. As you know, during this mandate we want to make a significant investment in the national road network and improve transports and communications. Nevertheless, we know that this is not enough to change our country's cartography. Like Minister Jorge Teme, I think about Ataúro and Oecussi, for instance, which have additional difficulties in terms of access to Dili. In the case of Oecussi, Dr Mari Alkatiri was appointed by the State to prepare the process that will transform the enclave into a Special Social and Market Economic Zone.

All these conditions have direct implications on the political participation by the Timorese and on the development of governance. Only an open debate can lead us to a consensus on a more inclusive governance model that can provide faster and more effective responses to the specific needs of our People.

Reducing the distance between the Government and its citizens through local government hubs is therefore a vital step for our Democracy and for creating a society that is more regionally balanced and consequently more cohesive as a Nation.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão
28 May 2013