



**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 INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR FOR
GRADUATED DENTAL NURSES AND DENTISTS ON PATIENT
CENTERED DENTISTRY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DILI**

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Tuesday, 26 November

Rector Dr. Antonio Cardoso Machado,
Commission Chief Augusto do Rosario,
Dr. Valerie Wordley,
Professor Raman Bedi,
Dr. Fernando Jong
Dra. Adriana da Silva,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here this morning at this International Seminar for Dental Nurses and Dentists on Patient Centered Dentistry.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you all on your study and your work in the field of dentistry and for your dedication to serving your country with these valuable and hard-earned technical skills.

And I would like to warmly welcome our international guests. Thank you for participating in this important event, and for sharing your expertise with our national dental health graduates.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Government of Timor-Leste is working hard to improve the health and well being of our people. And we thank all of you who are here today for making the commitment to study to be health professionals. Timor-Leste needs your skills and expertise now more than ever to make sure we have a healthy and productive population.

Like most people I do not particularly like a visit to the dentist.

One good thing about being in the resistance fighting for independence, was that I had no opportunity to go to the dentist! This was the case for most people during the dark years of our struggle.

As a result many Timorese people suffer from ongoing toothache, oral diseases and pain.

Oral diseases are the most common of the chronic diseases that developing countries face and poor dental health care causes widespread public health problems.

The effects on dental hygiene on people's overall wellbeing, which includes even cardiovascular health, and in preventing infections, is becoming increasingly apparent to dental scientists across the world.

I can assure you all here today that the government understands the importance of dental health. As is recognised in our Strategic Development Plan, tooth decay and tooth cavities are the most common dental health problem in Timor-Leste and it is estimated that 40% of our people have tooth cavities.

While we work to increase the number of dental health professionals it is, therefore, important that we focus on oral health promotion and the prevention of oral diseases as well as making emergency dental care available throughout the country.

When we became independent, and drafted our Constitution, we embedded medical care as a fundamental right for all citizens, and imposed on government a duty to promote and establish a national health system that is universal, general and free of charge. Dental care is, of course, an important part of health care.

However, Timor-Leste faces great challenges in delivering healthcare services to our people, many of whom live in remote areas and lack access to dentistry. This challenge is made all the more difficult because many of our people do not clearly understand how to care for their teeth and their children's teeth. And so, I am pleased that today there will be a presentation on Oral Health in Timor-Leste.

This is because Timor-Leste has its own context and its own struggle to provide universal access to dental care to its people. I am also pleased to see there will be presentations on important topics such as local anaesthesia and the management of medical emergencies.

It is also important, however, that we understand the development of dentistry in Timor-Leste not just in terms of improving our capacity for critical and emergency care but also for preventative health and good dental hygiene practices. Increasing awareness of general dental hygiene practices, particularly among those in rural areas, is necessary for our people in every age group.

Since independence, one of our greatest challenges has been building the human resources of our people, so that we can achieve the vision that we share for our nation.

Our lack of human resources has made providing universal health care a great challenge. While we have been fortunate to have the support of Cuba in not only

providing doctors but for training so many Timorese health professionals, our people have lacked proper access to dental care. This must change.

We do not have enough dentists or dental nurses. When the Strategic Development Plan was finalised in 2011, Timor-Leste only had seven dentists and forty dental nurses and, although we are improving, we still have an average of only around one dental nurse for every 25,000 people. This means that the treatment of our nation's dental problems is beyond the capacity of the existing dental health workforce.

When measuring the progress of our nation many people look to how many new roads there are, or how many new buildings are being built or how high our level of economic growth is. These indicators are of course important but we must never lose our focus on people. That is why the first part of our Strategic Development Plan is about building social capital. We know the true strength of our nation is our people. Improving health, education and quality of life of the Timorese people is central to building a fair and progressive nation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Timor-Leste needs your expertise in this complicated field that is so important to the well being and health of our population. Our country is thankful that you are here today as part of further expanding your knowledge, skills, experience and professionalism.

We are of course very grateful for the assistance of other countries as we build our healthcare service network and expand the capacity of our human resources. That is one reason that I am pleased that this seminar has so many participants from our neighbours and friends from other countries that are making such an important contribution to our people.

In Timor-Leste, however, we also recognise that we are responsible for our own future. It is only through the dedication and expertise of our own dentists and dental nurses that we will be able to fully address the oral healthcare needs of all of our people.

I am very proud of you for expanding your education and for your dedication in further studying dentistry, a field combining knowledge of both biology and technology, and a necessary skill that your country needs very urgently.

This seminar on 'Patient Centered Dentistry' is important not only for your work as young healthcare professionals, but also for the development of the healthcare services of our government and the wellbeing of our people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our children, our elderly, our adults – all members of our communities – will benefit from the valuable expertise which will be shared here today.

I hope there is a vibrant and fruitful exchange of ideas about best practices in the field of dentistry today, and I am grateful for your work for our people's wellbeing.

I commend the organisers of this seminar and thank you for your contribution to health care in Timor-Leste. I urge you to keep up the good and dedicated work that you do.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão
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