



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

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER
OF DEFENCE AND SECURITY OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF
TIMOR-LESTE, KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO, ON THE OCCASION OF
THE SPECIAL EVENT SAS CHARITY DINNER**

Perth, Australia

4 April 2014

His Excellency, Malcolm McKusker AV CVO QC, the Governor of Western Australia and Mrs McKusker

The Honourable Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Senator, the Honourable David Johnston, minister for Defence

The Honourable Joe Francis, MLA, Western Australian Minister for Veterans Affairs

The Honourable Alannah Mc Tiernan MP

The Honourable Tony Simpson, Western Australian Minister for Local Government

The Honourable Melissa Park, Member of Parliament

The Honourable Chris Ellison

The Honourable Peter Blaxell, Chairman SAS Resources Fund

Lieutenant Colonel Greg Daly, Commanding Officer and Mrs Daly

Air Chief Marshall (Ret) Angus Houston AC AFC

The Honourable Graham Edwards AM, State President of the RSL

Members of the Australian Defence Force

Current and former members of the Special Air Service Regiment

Family of members of the Special Air Service Regiment

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great privilege to be with you tonight at this dinner to honour the Special Air Service Regiment and to support the families of SAS members.

When I was invited by the SAS Resources Fund to speak at a fund raising dinner I made it a priority to come to Perth. It is important not only to me, but to the people of Timor-Leste, to give thanks to the SAS for their service to our nation.

I can speak personally about the courage and the dedication of the SAS.

While there was elation at our people's overwhelming vote for independence in 1999, the aftermath brought chaos. In the violence that followed the vote many died, our country was destroyed and many of our people fled to the mountains. When I returned to this turmoil, the SAS were by my side.

We will always remember that, at this very difficult time, when we were taking our first steps as a free people, the SAS and the Australian Defence Forces were with us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you know, the Australian military and its special forces have a long history of operations in our country which began during the Second World War.

It was during the Second World War that Australia first established elite special forces units. Two of the first units served in what was then Portuguese Timor. In December 1941 the 2/2nd Independent Company, represented here tonight by their families and supporters, landed in neutral Portuguese Timor. The following February the Japanese invaded. The 2/2nd conducted a guerrilla style campaign in our mountains and valleys and held down an entire Japanese Army division for almost twelve months. In September 1942 the 2/4th Independent Company joined the 2/2nd in this guerrilla campaign and carried out successful ambushes, bombing raids and surveillance.

These Australian special forces were clearly brave, remarkable men. But they could not have been so effective without the support of the thousands of Timorese villagers who risked their lives to provide food and shelter, carry supplies and act as guides and scouts for the Australian soldiers. I know in Australia you call the good men of Papua New Guinea who did the same thing the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels and in Timor-Leste they were called Criados. By January 1943 the 2/2nd and 2/4th had withdrawn back to Australia and the Timorese men, women and children paid an awful price with up to 60,000 killed during the Japanese occupation which lasted until the end of the war.

That is why, thirty years later, many Timorese felt hurt and betrayed when Australia supported Indonesia's occupation of our country in 1975.

It was comforting to hear many former members of 2/2nd and the 2/4th Independent Companies acknowledging the debt they owed the Timorese when they spoke out during our campaign for a fair share of resources in the Timor Sea some years ago.

We should also remember the link between those original special forces units, the Commandos, that served in Timor in II World War and today's SAS. I understand that the success of the 2/2nd and the 2/4th was later used as a model for training of the SAS.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I have already mentioned, the Australian Defence Forces and notably the SAS returned to our country in 1999. On 20 September 1999, the International Forces for East Timor, known as INTERFET, was deployed to Timor and was led by Australia. INTERFET commanded by my good friend, then Major General Peter Cosgrove who, now Sir Peter, with the help of the SAS and Australian and international soldiers, did an outstanding job in helping to restore order and security to our country. The contribution of INTERFET is remembered well by our people, and by me.

The Timorese people have a special sensibility not only to express their feelings but also to preserve their memories.

Right after the announcement of the result of the referendum, because of the violence and killings in Dili, many people took refuge in the UNAMET compound.

A baby was born in that compound and named Pedro UNAMET expressing not only the mother's anguish but also giving thanks for the fact she could deliver her child safely.

The same happened in the enclave of Oe-cusse when a woman was giving birth while Australian INTERFET tanks were rolling past her door. And so, in gratitude to the Australian forces, she named, at that very moment, her new child INTERFET.

As with that mother, the Timorese people will always remember the important role the SAS played during that time.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As is the case in many post-conflict countries, Timor-Leste struggled with stability in its early years and in 2006 we descended into unrest and violence.

Again, the Australian military, working with the New Zealand military, returned as part of the International Stabilisation Force. They joined Malaysian Forces and the Portuguese para-military GNR to help restore peace and order. The ISF left Timor-Leste in 2012 and we have enjoyed many years of peace and stability. Ladies and Gentlemen, we have said goodbye to conflict and we are now building our State and developing our country.

Timor-Leste will always acknowledge the contribution made by Australia during our journey to peace and stability and we will always honour the involvement of the SAS. We want to celebrate our shared history, remember the sacrifices of our people and retain the links and the memories.

We know that Australians are proud of their military history and the service of their soldiers around the world. We would be pleased to welcome more Australians to Timor-Leste to see first-hand not only the conditions faced by their soldiers but the success of the country they have helped build.

Today, I was pleased to be given a tour of the SAS Barracks and I was very impressed by what I saw. I was also honoured to lay a wreath at the memorial at the SAS barracks in memory of the fallen soldiers, both men and women, of the Australian defence forces.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Timor-Leste during the resistance we saw the great dignity and resilience of our people in the face of terror. We witnessed remarkable acts of sacrifice and saw ordinary people cope with terrible adversity and deprivation. Through all the horror and the violence we were reminded of the enduring hope and the essential goodness of humanity.

During the occupation the Timorese people stood up to fight for their homeland and for self-determination. They did this knowing the costs of resistance and knowing that many would die for their right to live in freedom. In the early years of our resistance we suffered awful losses as we were just learning how to wage war while at the same time we were overwhelmed by the occupier. The resistance was almost decimated. But like the Australian special forces that fought in Timor in World War II we mobilised a small force and waged a guerrilla war. And from this we built our struggle and brought our people together to fight for liberation.

Today in our country we remember the martyrs of this struggle who died so we could be free. We also honour the veterans of our struggle who gave so much for their people. Some complain that we provide too much support to our veterans and to their families, they say

that we cannot afford it - but who would we be as a people if we did not honour those that fought for our freedom and make sure that their families do not live in poverty.

I want to acknowledge here the RSL of Western Australia which is hosting a group of our Veterans visiting here in a few weeks and on ANZAC Day as well. They are here with an invitation from the National President of the RSL, Mr Steve Doolan.

Today in Timor-Leste we are drawing on the same reserves of courage and determination we showed in war towards building our nation. We want a healthy, well-educated and prosperous population.

Timor-Leste has already achieved a great deal. Our country now enjoys sustained peace and stability, with a successful democracy, the rule of law and a tolerant and free society. Our economy is one of the fastest growing in the world and we are taking big steps to alleviate extreme poverty and improve the lives of our people.

We also know that much still needs to be done. Many of our people suffer every day from poverty, poor living conditions and disadvantage. We need to improve our health care and education, our housing and sanitation, as well as basic infrastructure including roads and communications. We have a long term plan that provides a framework for our development but to succeed we will need to draw on the strengths we showed during the resistance.

We also know that Timor-Leste enjoys many friends that are working together with us as we build our country. This includes the Australian people and the Australian Government and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Julie Bishop for her dedicated support of Australia Timor-Leste relations. I understand that at an event held in Canberra last year, Minister Bishop said in her speech regarding the relationship between our two nations that "the best is yet to come"; I hope so Minister, and look forward to overcoming areas of challenge and working together.

Ladies and gentlemen

In Timor-Leste we have great respect for the way that Australia honours its Veterans and remembers all those that served and died in battle. The attendance at this dinner is an example of the importance that your nation rightly places on supporting your soldiers and their families.

In Timor-Leste we know as good as any the brutality, the despair and the utter heart break and hopelessness of war. War is not an adventure. It is full of madness and horror. The invasion and occupation of Timor-Leste had a catastrophic impact on our people who were held hostage by violence for a generation.

We know that the costs of war are not just borne by the soldiers. There is also a great cost to families both during and after conflict. The impact on families is often hidden while they bear the brunt of trauma and grief. And the greatest sacrifice is borne by the loved ones of soldiers that do not return.

Tonight, we are honoured to be joined by the wives of four members of the SAS that served in Timor-Leste and that have since died in combat. We honour:

- Mrs Leigh Locke, wife of Sergeant Matthew Locke, MG, deceased
- Mrs TA Diddams, wife of Sergeant Blaine Diddams, MG, deceased

- Mrs Naomi Nary, wife of Warrant Officer Class Two David Nary, deceased
- Mrs Taryn Linacre, wife of Sergeant Craig Linacre, deceased.

While she was able to attend tonight I would also like to honour Mrs Kylie Russell, wife of Sergeant Andrew Russell, deceased.

I cannot stand here and tell you that we can measure the contribution of these SAS members – it is not possible to value. On behalf of Timor-Leste I give thanks for their service to our nation and together we all say, lest we forget.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We honour the members of the SAS and tonight we honour their families and loved ones. I salute the SAS Members living and fallen. Timor-Leste gives thanks to the contribution of SAS members in not only protecting me on my return to my homeland, but in putting their lives at risk to protect the Timorese people.

I also pay tribute to the SAS Resources Trust and its supporters for the great work in giving comfort to the families of SAS members.

Thank you for inviting me tonight. It is a special honour.

Thank you very much.

4 April 2014
Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão