



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

**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO AT THE DINNER  
RECEPTION FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF THE RETURNED AND SERVICES LEAGUE  
OF AUSTRALIA, THE WAR WIDOWS' GUILD OF AUSTRALIA AND THE DEPARTMENT  
OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS FOR NEW SOUTH WALES AND THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY AND IN COMMEMORATION OF FALINTIL DAY**

**Palacio de Lahane, Dili**

**FALINTIL Day, 20 August 2014**

His Excellency, Taur Matan Ruak, President of the Republic and Her Excellency the First Lady, Isabel Ferreira

His Excellency, Adérito Hugo da Costa, Acting President of the National Parliament

His Excellency, Major General Lere Anan Timur, Chief of F-FDTL

His Excellency, Mr Peter Doyle, Australian Ambassador to Timor-Leste

The Honourable, Mr Steve Bracks AC, Former Premier of Victoria

Mr Don Rowe OAM, New South Wales State President, Returned and Services League of Australia, Representing the President of the National RSL

Ms Wendy Thompson, New South Wales Guild President, War Widows' Guild of Australia

Mr Chris Perrin, Chief Executive Officer, New South Wales, Returned and Services League of Australia

Ms Jennifer Collins, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Veterans' Affairs for New South Wales and the Australia Capital Territory

Veterans of Timor-Leste

Members of Government

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great privilege to welcome you all here to this dinner in honour of our friends from the Returned and Services League of Australia, the War Widows' Guild of Australia and the Department of Veterans Affairs of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

It is a pleasure to have so many of our Australian friends and colleagues here in Dili as we continue to deepen the relationship between our veterans and the veterans' organisations of our two countries.

We have been delighted to return the hospitality given to the group of twenty Timorese veterans and widows who visited Australia in April. They were very touched by their welcome and were extremely honoured to march with Australian veterans on ANZAC day.

Timor-Leste and Australia share a military history that began with the Second World War when two special forces units served in what was then Portuguese Timor. In December 1941 the 2/2<sup>nd</sup> Independent Company arrived in Timor. They conducted a guerrilla style

campaign in our mountains and valleys and were joined in September 1942 by the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Independent Company.

These Australian soldiers were brave and remarkable men. They could not have been so effective, however, without the support of the thousands of Timorese who risked their lives to provide food and shelter, carry supplies and act as guides and scouts for the Australian soldiers. By January 1943 the Australian soldiers had withdrawn back to Australia and the Timorese men, women and children paid an awful price with up to 60,000 killed during the occupation which lasted until the end of the war.

Australian Defence Forces returned to our county 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 was commanded by Major General Peter Cosgrove, now Sir Peter, who did an outstanding job in helping to restore order and security. The contribution of INTERFET is remembered well by our people and I am pleased to be joining my good friend, the Governor General of Australia, in Melbourne on 20 September for a conference to mark INTERFET's 15th anniversary.

Following internal unrest in 2006 the Australian military, working with the New Zealand military, returned as part of the International Stabilisation Force. After many years of peace and stability the ISF left Timor-Leste in 2012.

We know that Australians have fought bravely not only in Timor-Leste, but in fields of battle across the world's continents and oceans. Australians have a proud military history and have fought far from home in the cause of freedom and in support of friends and allies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the 24 years of our occupation we fought a brutal and difficult struggle for our freedom and our independence. The Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor, known as FALINTIL, engaged in a guerrilla resistance against the occupation. We walked across many of the same paths as the Australian soldiers before us.

Today is FALINTIL Day, a special day for our nation when we commemorate the formation of our resistance army. For 24 years, FALINTIL fought a war without any external military support, while developed nations supplied weapons, aircraft and training to the occupying forces to destroy the resistance of our small Timorese guerrilla army. We were so small, and so ill-equipped, and we were fighting a giant and its allies. While we had few supporters we will not forget those that stood with us. We remember that after the invasion, the New South Wales RSL supported a motion, put forward by the 2nd/2nd Commandos, for Australia to help East Timor.

But we had a dream that inspired us to persist in the guerrilla campaign in the mountains and valleys of Timor. Our soldiers showed great courage and against all odds, in 1999, our people were allowed to vote in a referendum on independence.

And now, the sun rises every day over a free Timor-Leste because of the sacrifices of the combatants of national liberation and the martyrs who fell to make possible our dream of independence. We must never lose sight of this history and we must continue to honour their sacrifice and achievement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Timor-Leste we have great respect for the way Australia honours its Veterans and remembers all those that served and died in battle.

The twenty veterans and widows who recently returned from Australia were impressed by the great esteem in which veterans are held. And they were inspired by the services and organisations that support veterans, war widows and their families.

We look to Australia to learn how we can better organise and support our veterans. During this week we have had many discussions with our friends from Australia about how we can better structure and organise support for our veterans and honour their sacrifice.

We know that the cost of war is not just borne by the soldiers. There is also a great cost to families. And the greatest sacrifice is borne by the loved ones of soldiers that have fallen. Which is why we have been particularly interested to learn about ways to better support our war widows and their families.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tonight we pay tribute to veterans and war widows from both Australia and Timor-Leste. We recognise their contribution to our freedom and our liberty.

We celebrate FALINTIL day and commemorate the formation of our resistance army that led our people to independence.

And we thank our Australian friends who have shown such wonderful solidarity and support to our veterans and war widows and who are working together with us to help make sure that we celebrate the memory of our struggle and the sacrifices of our people.

Thank you very much.

I would now like to propose a toast to the Governor General and the people of Australia.

Dili, 20 August 2014

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão