



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

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: INTERFET, REFLECTIONS
ON THE 1999 EAST TIMOR CRISIS**

Melbourne

20 September 2014

Lieutenant General Kiki Syahnakri (Rtd)

Major General Surasit Thanadtang

Lieutenant General Ash Power, AO, CSC (Rtd) (former Colonel Operations INTERFET)

Major General Mark Kelly, AO, DSC (Rtd) (former Chief of Staff INTERFET)

Major General Orlando Ambrocio (Rtd) (former Commander of the
Philippines Humanitarian Support Mission to East Timor)

Major General Jim Barry, AM, MBE, RFD, ED (Rtd)

Colonel Marcus Fielding (former Brigade Major West Force, INTERFET)

Admiral Chris Barrie, AC (Rtd) (former Chief of the Australian Defence Force)

Doctor John Blaxland (former Intelligence Officer West Force, INTERFET)

Colonel Kevin Burnett, ONZM (Rtd) (former Commanding Officer New Zealand Battalion)

Lieutenant General Mark Evans, AO, DSC (Rtd) (former Commander West Force,
INTERFET)

Colonel Neil Thompson, CSC (Rtd) (former Commander Response Force, INTERFET)

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to speak at this Conference marking the 15 year anniversary of the arrival of INTERFET in Timor-Leste.

I commend Military History and Heritage Victoria, the School of International, Political and Strategic Studies, the College of Asia and the Pacific and the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, for co-hosting this event.

This conference gives us the opportunity to reflect on the events that led to the Restoration of Independence in Timor-Leste and the fiery re-birth of our nation.

It reminds us of the strength and resilience of our people and of a time when humanitarian values of peace and freedom guided the behavior of nations.

While we know that the crisis of 1999 revealed some of the worst of humanity, it also revealed humanity as its best – as demonstrated by the resilience and strength of our people, and by the decision of the international community to intervene to stop the violence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to share with you my perspective on the crisis of 1999, and the need for the intervention of International Forces East Timor, known with great affection as INTERFET.

To understand the significance of the INTERFET intervention it is necessary to consider the history of our struggle for independence and to locate that struggle in the context of broader international events.

The Timorese undertook a long and difficult path to liberation. For almost five centuries we were subject to the Portuguese colonial rule, a situation which led to numerous unsuccessful revolts. Our history registered the biggest and the last one in 1912, the Manufahi Revolt, which we celebrated in 2012. This same spirit of resistance was on display during the devastating Japanese occupation of our land during the Second World War.

The Second World War was the first significant major event that brought the Timorese and Australian people together. In December 1941 the 2/2nd Independent Company landed in neutral Portuguese Timor and the following February the Japanese invaded. The 2/2nd conducted a guerrilla style campaign in our mountains and valleys that was in many ways replicated by the Timorese resistance decades later. In September 1942 the 2/4th Independent Company joined the 2/2nd before both companies withdrew back to Australia by January 1943.

The Australian soldiers 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, with many losing their lives as well, to provide food and shelter, carry supplies and act as guides and scouts for the Australian soldiers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In April 1974, the Carnation Revolution put an end to the dictatorship and to the colonial empire in Portugal. This led to the recognition of the right to self-determination for the African colonies as well as for Timor-Leste, so on 28 November 1975, we made a unilateral declaration of independence. Nine days later we were invaded by the Indonesian Armed Forces.

The past is a very different place and was a period of high international tension in Southeast Asia. The United States and Australia were engaged in the Vietnam War, responding to western fears of the spread of communism. By the end of 1975 the war was lost and communist governments came to power in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Like so many people living in poor countries around the world, the Timorese also became victims of the Cold War. Our people were forsaken by the major western powers that gave Soeharto the green light to invade East Timor and, for two decades, remained silent or supported our annexation. And so, for 24 years, we fought a war without any external military support, while developed nations supplied weapons, tanks, aircraft and training to the occupying forces to destroy the resistance of the small and ill-equipped guerrilla army, with less than 1,500 personnel. Unlike other liberation struggles, in Africa and Asia, we did not have a land border with a friendly country or an external provider of weapons. We were fighting literally alone, solely dependent on our capability to counter the annihilation operations.

However, our strategy was to fight not only in our lands, but also in the hearts and minds of the international public. We took our campaign to countries around the world and to the United Nations. Our weapons in this campaign included newspaper and magazine articles, photos, films, public talks and protests. We built one of the largest solidarity movements in the world.

Importantly, we took our campaign to Indonesia. We never considered the Indonesian people our enemies as we knew they were also suffering under the dictatorship that, ironically, was a good ally of the western powers. We prioritised developing relationships of solidarity including with the pro-democracy movement inside Indonesia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We were fortunate to have the support of many Australians. We knew that despite the unjust policies of successive Australian Governments, the Australian people did not support the illegal occupation of our country. Many Australian solidarity movement activists suffered intimidation, but they continued to support us.

We owe them a great debt as without their support, I would not be here today and Timor-Leste would not be an independent nation. We have honoured many of them with the Order of Timor-Leste.

The late Brian Manning and Dennis Freney were two honoured very recently, in a ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Dili.

Brian Manning, and other Australian supporters, ensured that we had six radio transmitters that allowed the resistance to communicate with the outside world. This operation was illegal in Australia and continued until the end 1978, because our radio transmitter was captured in

that year, terminating the only link between the outside world and the resistance. However, in 1984, I received a new radio transmitter and we re-established the link to Darwin. It was more difficult to work in Darwin than in the mountains of Timor-Leste and I was informed so many times they had to change their locations to avoid confiscation and arrest. And then the day came and we lost again our only radio link to the outside world.

Dennis Freney was the pioneer of the first movement of Australian solidarity with Timor-Leste. Mr Freney helped establish several branches throughout Australia of the Campaign for the Independence of East Timor. Despite surveillance, monitoring and persecution by intelligence and security agencies, Mr Freney worked tirelessly so that the world got to know that our resistance was strong.

We also honoured the late Dr. Andrew McNaughtan, a medical doctor who visited Timor-Leste many times during the 1990s. In October 1998, Dr Andrew McNaughtan smuggled out the entire Indonesian army personnel records. These records showed that troop numbers had increased, disproving claims of military withdrawal. He also worked tirelessly to tell the stories of the Australian soldiers who fought in Timor in Second World War and the Timorese who helped them.

One such soldier, now deceased, was Cliff Morris, an Australian dairy farmer from New South Wales. At the age of 21 he had fought in Timor-Leste during the Second World War as a commando with 2nd/4th Independent Company. In 1976 Mr Morris was one of four Australians who were arrested, convicted and fined for trying to sail to East Timor with medical supplies. Cliff Morris said the reason he supported our people was because he owed his life to them during Second World War. Sadly, Mr Morris died in 1998 and never saw an independent Timor-Leste.

Just today, I was also privileged to award the Order of Solidarity to four Australian activists at a ceremony at Queen's Hall at the Victorian Parliament. Three were in attendance, Jill Jolliffe, Fabio Cavadini and John Sinnott, while we honoured the memory of Michelle Turner who sadly passed before she could see an independent Timor-Leste. All made selfless and important contributions to our cause of freedom.

I cannot discuss INTERFET without mentioning some Australians who are unknown to us, but whose contributions are absolutely vital to making sense of the events of 1999. We do not know their names, and perhaps we never will, but these Australians ensured that there was a constant series of leaks of intelligence and diplomatic material that revealed the truth of our situation and provided momentum for action. I expect some of these leaks will be discussed today as we all look for the truth of this dramatic episode in our regional history.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While the Cold War had worked against us, towards the end of the millennium international events began to turn in our favour. In 1997, the Asian Financial Crisis spread through our region and gripped many countries of East Asia. Indonesia was hit particularly hard and its economy collapsed with plunging exchange rates and sky rocketing inflation. This led to widespread rioting and protests and as Indonesia started to falter, the resistance gained renewed hope and mass demonstrations were held across Timor. With the economic crisis engulfing Indonesia, after 30 years in power, President Soeharto was forced to step down on 21 May 1998.

And so, while the Asian Financial Crisis brought hardship to Indonesians, it also ushered in sweeping political changes that today remain of global significance. Just as the Timorese were on the cusp of achieving their independence, Indonesia's transition to democracy – and its emergence as a great nation – had begun.

After so many years of struggle, the combination of international and domestic pressure, internal upheaval and the costs of war gave us a chance at freedom. It was this path of history that led our people to be given, on 30 August 1999, the opportunity to vote on their future under a referendum called a 'popular consultation', to be conducted by a United Nations Mission in East Timor.

Like so many dramatic events in world history, this was a day so many people thought would never come. During the struggle, we followed with anxiety the referendum process in Western Sahara that, for no reason, is still being postponed today. I mention this because, while in Jakarta, under house arrest, the UNAMET Chief asked me to postpone, due to the increasing violence, and my answer was 'no', reminding him of the Western Sahara case and that, for two decades, we accepted all the sacrifices and we were ready for the last one.

I would suggest that this should give us all pause, when we consider responses to our new world of disorder, and remind us that if history has taught us anything it is that the future is unpredictable. And that if you don't take the right decision, at the right time, you will wait for too long to repair the damage, if you are able to at all. From the fall of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the Asian Financial Crisis, the development of the internet, the September 11 attacks, the Global Financial Crisis to the Arab Spring – these events that dramatically changed the world were unexpected by most, while we see the western powers battling with new and more difficult challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our independence Referendum was an uplifting event for our people that brought the promise of self-determination after many years of struggle. While we knew the wishes in the hearts of our people, we also knew best the situation on the ground in our country and the risks of a vote for independence.

On 30 August the Timorese people came out to vote in a collective act of courage and determination. The Referendum had a turnout rate of 98.6% and 78.5% voted for independence. The Timorese people had achieved what so many had told us was no more than a dream.

Today, the Referendum stands as a testament to the bravery and the dignity of our people. We knew that a vote for independence would provoke vengeance and retaliation. After the result was announced on 4 September widespread violence broke out, spreading across our country. People were killed as a scorched earth campaign of destruction was carried out, leaving most of our country in ruins.

This was a bittersweet moment for our people as our joy turned to despair. Just as our dreams of freedom were becoming a reality we faced further brutality and fear. Our people were desperate. We were not certain if the international community would intervene with peacekeeping forces, so desperately needed.

We, Falintil, chose not to participate in the voting process, knowing that it could provoke even more violence, than the terrible violence that had preceded the referendum many months before the vote. This was a strategic decision, not an easy one, but one that was the right one. We, in no way, wanted to risk the referendum being abandoned, or impugned; and Falintil stayed in barracks.

Despite the chaos and bloodshed that followed the referendum, our resistance soldiers still remained in barracks. While the armed FALINTIL guerillas could hear the pleas of anguish from their people, they did not- could not leave the barracks. That time in the barracks demonstrated the extraordinary discipline of our soldiers. It was a time of great torment for our people and our soldiers, but we had learnt the hard lessons of history and knew that, if we responded to the violence, the situation in our country would have been portrayed as a civil war. That time of doing nothing, was the ultimate test of our resistance.

We knew that the world was watching and that there was great international concern for our situation. And it was clear that we needed help to deal with our humanitarian and security crisis, and that we needed help to restore order. As our country went up in flames, the pressure for something to be done increased.

As I am speaking in Melbourne, I must pay tribute to the more than 40,000 people who marched here in this city on 10 September 1999. They were followed by tens of thousands more around Australia, all demanding respect for our right to self-determination. I must also thank the Australian union movement and its members who stood with us and undertook effective action in support of our cause.

And, of course, I must thank the Australian Government for committing to lead the international peacekeeping effort to restore order in our country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Following an invitation and authorisation from Indonesia, on 15 September the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1264 calling for a multi-national force to restore peace and stability. On 20 September 1999 INTERFET began deploying to our country. A coalition of 22 countries contributed to INTERFET. At its peak more than 11,000 personnel were involved.

I am pleased that we have the key players from many of nations participating at this conference including New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines.

INTERFET was, of course, led by force commander, Major General Peter Cosgrove, now Sir Peter Cosgrove, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, who shall join us shortly, to give his account of INTERFET.

Major General Cosgrove and I established a good working relationship. I soon realised that he was a man of moral integrity and a great leader. However, it took a serious incident for both of us to get to that point. It was the matter of the modus operandi between INTERFET and FALINTIL, and it was this modus operandi, that aided and enabled the success of the INTERFET Mission. FALINTIL had not only accepted to be cantoned, but had embraced it, knowing it was an essential plank in INTERFET's securing of the peace. The incident I shall now recount put the mission at risk.

It was 11 pm, November 18th, 1999. I had fallen into bed, after another exhausting day, when Commander Riak was ushered in. His distress was evident as he told me that a group of some 20 Falintil soldiers had been moving from their cantonment of Bobonaro to cantonment at Alieu, and when their truck broke in Dili, they were surrounded by some seven tanks and truckloads of INTERFET soldiers who confiscated their weapons, in a heavy handed manner.

I knew I had to take action and I did.

Early next morning a helicopter touched down in Alieu with an INTERFET official on board, to try and talk me out of my protest visit to Dili. I declined to meet and headed off with my men. I had a pistol in its holster strapped to my leg and my men had their arms. If anyone was going to disarm my men, they had to disarm me. We drove in convoy until we were intercepted by INTERFET at Dare (ironically where the Sparrow Force memorial is). Major-General Cosgrove tried to talk me out of proceeding, but we kept going. We got further down the road towards Díli, to a place called Lahane, where we stopped to refuel. The INTERFET vehicles set up a roadblock. We got out and marched past, with INTERFET following behind. Our people came out in droves. They were happy to see us, singing out "Viva Falintil". It was both tense and festive. Major-General Cosgrove appealed to me not to proceed. I responded. "In my country we do not negotiate on the side of the road. I will talk to you at the UN compound, which is where we are heading."

We marched into Sergio's office at UNTAET Headquarters. Major General Cosgrove followed. I then outlined the incident and its impact. Major General Cosgrove explained that it had arisen due to a misunderstanding, and in future greater attention would be given to identifying any armed group. I responded saying, "Your men are the saviours of our people, General," "But please don't forget that the heroes are my men, the Falintil." "I will not accept that they be treated like armed bandits or petty criminals."

Honour and order was then restored, on a handshake. The strategy was on track.

Thanks to Major General Cosgrove's inspired leadership INTERFET now enjoys a legendary quality in Australia's military history.

INTERFET had been warmly welcomed by the Timorese and is remembered well by our people. It freed us from a dark period of awful violence and fear. It ended a humanitarian crisis and allowed our people to come down from their hideouts in the mountains and begin the process of building a new democratic state.

INTERFET was an outstanding success that brought peace and restored order over a country and provided the stability to allow the United Nations mission, UNTAET, to effectively begin its operations.

We must also record for historical purposes what I cited above, and it is that the success of INTERFET was also thanks to the cooperation and support of FALINTIL. The support that was given was of a strategic nature. It was to actively engage in our cantonment, and if we left not to carry our weapons. We were mature enough to know that needed to be done for the sake of the nation. That was our very reason for existence and we were not going to abandon our cause at this final stage of our independence struggle. We knew that

INTERFET needed to have full capability to succeed.

The FALINTIL soldiers, who had for years fought in the most difficult of conditions to free their people, welcomed the INTERFET force and assisted them in their mission.

I also want to acknowledge that despite the ensuing carnage the late Sergio Vieira de Mello, Major General Peter Cosgrove, Lieutenant General Kiki Syahnakri, and I met at the border to discuss and agree on the best way to secure the peace. This was critical to the success of the Peace Keeping Operation, as without such collaboration and cooperation, it could not work. All parties are needed at the table to succeed, and this is what we secured. The dynamics of this and the relationships is a 'lesson learned' for other peace keeping operations.

The other acknowledgement is to Australia's SAS, who toured my country with me, by car or in helicopters, ensuring my safety. What wonderfully trained soldiers they are, and men of great caliber and a credit to Australia.

The Timorese people have a special sensibility not only to express their feelings but also to preserve their memories. A perfect example of this occurred in our enclave of Oe-cusse where a woman was giving birth in her home when INTERFET tanks rolled past her front door. And so, in gratitude to the peace the INTERFET forces had secured, she named, at that very moment, her new child INTERFET. And so today, there is a teenager running around Oe-cusse who is known to his friends by the nickname 'Inter'.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In many ways INTERFET laid the foundations for the special relationship we have with Australia today.

For many of our people the sight of Australian soldiers in 1999 put right the historical wrong of recognising the Indonesian annexation of East Timor. The Australians of INTERFET were well liked on the streets of our country. Their down to earth manner and professional approach gave our people confidence and they started to look at Australia in a new and positive light.

It was also a result of the INTERFET intervention that many Australians began to establish links with districts in Timor-Leste. Local councils in many parts of Australia have established 'friendship city' arrangements with various places in Timor-Leste and many schools have begun to build links with schools in Timor-Leste. We now enjoy so many people to people links, which have built deep bonds of friendship and solidarity between our countries. I wish

to acknowledge our Ambassador to Australia, H.E. Abel Guterres for his initiative regarding this.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The success of INTERFET provides a model for peace keeping operations.

Today we live in a confused world – a new world of disorder. We face conflict and turmoil across the globe that the international community seems unwilling or unable to resolve. We have seen that the use of force is not always the most effective way to approach deep rooted tensions and conflict that, at their core, are fuelled by poverty, injustice, ignorance and marginalisation. Regrettably, we see powerful nations acting to achieve short-term solutions to defend their strategic interests, rather than taking meaningful engagements to address the root causes of conflict and fragility.

INTERFET has proved to be a shining light in the history of international military engagements to bring peace and order. It is therefore a model that should be looked at as global leaders consider international military interventions. In many ways, however, INTERFET benefited from a set of unique circumstances. These included an invitation from the Indonesian Government, establishment in accordance with international law and with the Security Council endorsement, a local population that welcomed international intervention, a broad regional and international coalition, adequate forces to get the job done and, importantly, outstanding leadership. It was also a just and proper cause.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference provides us with the opportunity not only to reflect on the crisis of 1999 but to consider different perspectives for the benefit of a proper accounting of Timorese history and of the INTERFET intervention.

One thing that we must all remember is the role INTERFET played in building the foundation for the reconciliation amongst the Timorese and with Indonesia, which helped the establishment of a tolerant and peaceful society in Timor-Leste. This was the only condition needed for a vibrant and free democracy contributing to a growing economy that is improving the lives of its people.

Thank you very much.

20 September 2014
Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão