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Minister Gusmão opens facilities at Balibo

On Friday, the Minister of Planning and Strategic Investment officially opened the Balibo Fort Hotel and Cultural and Heritage Centre. The construction of the hotel is the result of a long-term project of cooperation in the local community implemented by the Balibo House Trust. The Trust serves to honor the memory of five Australian based journalists killed in Balibo by Indonesian forces in 1975 and to improve the lives and livelihoods of the local people.

The Hotel is within the grounds of a 350 year-old Portuguese fort complex and sits high in the hills of Balibo overlooking the village of Batugade and offering a spectacular view of the Banda Sea stretching north to the horizon. With this magnificent vista, a pleasant climate, quality accommodation and colorful local attractions, the hotel is set to be a popular tourist destination in the years to come.

Eight brand new hotel rooms have been constructed along with a complete refurbishment of the old Fort House which was built in 1946. The beautifully restored Fort House will be the restaurant and meeting place for guests. All profits from the running of the hotel will be invested back into projects for the local community. The hotel is providing direct jobs for local people and people that visit have the potential to invigorate the local economy with their spending.

At the opening Minister Gusmão spoke of his pride in the local community and noted that the hotel “will provide jobs and income for people in Balibo and allow the Trust to continue supporting the community.” He thanked members of the Trust including family members of the journalists who were killed in 1975. Shirley Shackleton, now 84 years old and wife of journalist Greg Shakleton was an honored guest along with John Milkins the son of journalist Gary Cunningham.

Secretary of State for Arts and Culture, H.E. Isabel Ximenes, representing the Minister of Tourism, encouraged the community to continue their hard work and said “We must preserve cultural heritage all over our country.” Chefe de Suco of Balibo, Mr. Domingos de Assis welcomed all the guests to Balibo and expressed his appreciation for the project.



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Spokesperson for the Government, Minister of State Agio Pereira noted “This opening is another step in a relationship that began with a very sad event on the 16th of October 1975, but has now led to very positive outcomes in Balibo. The Community Learning Center being opened in 2003, the ongoing work of the Trust over the last 13 years and now the opening of the Fort Hotel and Cultural and Heritage Centre are all milestones in a remarkable journey of friendship and cooperation.”**ENDS**



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