



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

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE,
DR RUI MARIA DE ARAÚJO,
AT THE OFFICIAL DINNER HONOURING HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL
PIETRO PAROLIN, SECRETARY OF STATE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE
FRANCIS AND PAPAL LEGATE**

**Noble Palace of Lahane
14 August 2015**

Your Eminence, Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Your Excellency, the President of the Court of Appeal

Your Excellencies, former Holders of Sovereignty Bodies

Your Excellency, the Prosecutor-General of the Republic

Your Excellency, Monsignor Joseph Marino, Apostolic Nuncio to Timor-Leste.

Your Excellency, Bishop Basílio do Nascimento, President of Timor-Leste's Episcopal Conference

Your Excellency, Bishop Norberto do Amaral, Vice-President of Timor-Leste's Episcopal Conference

Your Excellency, Monsignor Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nuncio to Singapore

Your Excellency, Monsignor Francesco Cao Minh Dung, Counsellor to the Apostolic Nunciature.

Your Excellency, Monsignor Ionut Paul Strejac, Vatican's Charge d'Affaires in Timor-Leste

Most reverent Priests and Nuns,

Members of Parliament

Members and former Members of Government

Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps

Representatives of the Religious Denominations and Civil Society

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for us Timorese to receive in Timor-Leste His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of Vatican, and His Holiness Pope Francis' Legate to the celebration of 500 years of evangelization in Timor-Leste, as well as his delegation.

On behalf of all Timorese, I wish to thank the Holy See in the person of His Holiness Pope Francis for honouring us with the presence of his Legate during the highlight of the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of our people's evangelization and Christianization.

It is with great satisfaction and with comforted souls that tomorrow we will receive the Holy Eucharist from His Eminence, on the day when the Catholic Church celebrates the solemnity of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary into Heaven.

At the same time, we signed today the Agreement between the Holy See and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. It is indeed an historical event, in an historical moment for Timor-Leste, and one for which many Timorese have been waiting a long time!

Something the Timorese have wanted for a long time, while being held in practice since the very first contact with the Dominican Priests 500 years ago. In practice we had a Agreement since long ago, but formally it began to take shape only in 2006, and it come true today with the signing of an agreement establishing the legal framework for the relations between the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and the Holy See. Please

allow me to use this moment to publicly convey my gratitude to the State institutions involved and to the Holy See for the cooperation and diligences during the negotiations that led to the signing of this agreement, as well as for accepting to have it outside the Vatican territory, which is a particular honour for the Timorese people.

For a young country that has only restored its independence thirteen years ago, this is another reason for us to be proud. This feeling is easy to explain and to understand if we recall the year of 1515, when the Portuguese first arrived in Timor and missionaries started spreading Catholic faith and the Catholic religion.

Since then, the Catholic Church has played a key role in the construction of our identity, as well as in our upbringing and education as individuals. Our ancestors, 500 years ago and us today, soon realized that the ideals of Catholicism, particularly its humanistic values, matched those with which we identified ourselves as a people. This harmony and comfort we felt when Catholicism met our culture and our beliefs and enabled us to grow and to become stronger, while making Catholicism increasingly wide spread in our daily lives.

Thus, the Catholic Church remained and grew within our territory. This led to the creation of schools and seminaries, which played a vital role in the noble task and responsibility of educating and training many Timorese citizens. This was the core basis of our social evolution and had a strong influence years later when we struggled to become independent and to transform our nation.

During the long years of Indonesian occupation, when even our most basic rights were denied, the Church and its missionaries always remained within our territory. They fought for us and alongside us to protect our rights as human beings and they were instrumental in the consolidation of our cause for independence!

The Church gave us its protection during the period of Timorese resistance. It provided shelter to our battered bodies, while strengthening our faith and our souls. Additionally, the Church echoed our voices throughout the world. It played an absolutely important role in our struggle.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

No one can deny the role that the Catholic Church played in building our nation and making us what we are proud to be today: an independent country with a high percentage of Catholics. The eternally messianic presence of the Church united the Timorese people and gave us hope, as indeed it is written in our Constitution.

The evangelization of the Timorese people started 500 years ago, while our Constitution has only been drafted 13 years ago. Today the Catholic Church continues to guide us and to inspire the people, providing strong support in areas such as education and in social activities, in promoting the highest humanist values and contributing from the start to our national development and to the strengthening and preservation of our people's Catholic identity.

Acknowledging the highest importance of the role played by the Church and the fact that we share some common concerns, I would like to underline that we want to continue working side by side in order to contribute to the development of our people, both as human beings and in what concerns their social and cultural aspects.

We are together in causes as noble as the dignity of the human being, social inclusiveness, education, the fight against hunger and poverty and even environmental protection, just to mention a few.

We want to continue promoting cooperation with the Church in order to maintain justice, peace, the common good, social cohesion and national unity, as well as to strengthen the values of the population, which is a sine qua non condition for enabling the wellbeing and development of the people of Timor-Leste, so that they can lead dignified lives.

The signing of the Agreement today, based on the principle of mutual respect, solidarity and cooperation, and the presence of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin in our country, particularly in the year when we celebrate five centuries of evangelization, represents the strengthening of relations between the Holy See and Timor-Leste and has an immeasurable historical value that will never be forgotten. For that, I invite you to join me, and raise our glasses in salute of the Holy See. Long life to His Holiness Pope Francis and wishes for an everlasting relationship between the Holy See and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

Thank you very much.

Dr Rui Maria de Araújo
Dili, 14 August 2015