



**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 68th MEETING OF THE WHO
REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR SOUTH EAST ASIA
INAUGURAL SESSION**

**Dili Conventions Centre, Dili
07 September 2015**

Your Excellency the Speaker of the Parliament
Your Excellency the President of the Court of Appeals
Your Excellencies Members of the National Parliament and Members of the Government
Excellencies, the Ministers of Health from Member States of WHO South-East Asia
Region and Heads of delegations;
Distinguished Representatives from Member States of WHO South-East Asia Region;
Excellencies, ambassadors;
Dr Hans Trondsson, Assistant Director General, World Health Organization;
Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, the Regional Director for WHO South-East Asia Region
Head of UN agencies
Representatives from Timor-Leste's development partners
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Timor-Leste!

I am very pleased to be here today to inaugurate the 68th Session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for South-East Asia.

This is the first time this prestigious committee is meeting in Timor-Leste since we became a member of the World Health Organization in 2002. I remember representing Timor-Leste when we became the 192nd Member State of WHO, and when we first voted for WHO's regional directorship.

I am very proud that 13 years on, Timor-Leste is able to host this event in our country with nine (9) health ministers of WHO's South-East Asia Region present with their delegations to actively engage in talks and in productive discussions over the next 5 days.

You will set the health priorities as well as the health agenda for our Region; a tremendous task that will affect the lives of millions of people.

Good Health is paramount for the People of Timor-Leste and a priority for my government, and I am sure you wish the same to your people.

The strength of our Peoples and of our Nations depends on some of the decisions we will be making collectively here because this regional meeting presents opportunities for the member countries to contribute towards the direction of the WHO at the Regional level.

We will also have ample opportunity for bilateral discussions between our countries on issues of shared interest in the health sector.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

Since the restoration of our independence in 2002, one of the key priorities for Timor-Leste has been to build a health sector that can respond to our needs efficiently and adequately, in particular the needs of 70% of our population who live in the rural areas of the country.

We have achieved much in this regard over the past 16 years through assertive leadership, evidence-based policies such as emphasis on primary health care, and sound partnerships, including with many of the UN agencies, international development agencies and NGO's present here today.

With adequate foresight we were able to train some 1,000 medical doctors through a strategic partnership with Cuba, and because of this we have now been able to intensify the primary health care approach through comprehensive programs like the

Programa Nacional de Saúde na Família (The National Program of Health in the Family), which started to provide unprecedented health care assistance to our People. It is expected that by 28 November 2016, every family member in this country has had a first contact with a health care provider, with subsequent visits planned as needed. Within this approach families are categorised according to public health risks, individuals within the family will have their health status monitored on a regular basis, and interventions both at family and individual levels provided accordingly. Home visits for consultations, counselling and data gathering are the cornerstones of this Health in the Family approach.

This is very important because rather than expecting patients to access basic health services often having to travel many hours, if not days, on foot, and crossing dangerous rivers during the rainy season, we are taking health services to the People, into the families instead.

This is one of the ways we are investing in our future in Timor-Leste.

With a Strong and Healthy People we will have a Strong Nation capable of expressing our full sovereignty, including reclaiming our yet to be resolved maritime sovereignty.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

My government's program is guided by the vision and ambition of Timor-Leste's Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030 and we are continuing the work already started by previous governments.

By 2030 we aim to have comprehensive high quality health services accessible to all Timorese people.

This is a bold ambition that we need to achieve because good health is essential for a good quality of life and all Timorese are entitled to it.

Our Ministry of Health has embarked on a comprehensive approach to strategic planning, policies, directions and has set out strategic goals and strategies that will guide the development and the growth of health services across the country.

We now have the National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2011-2030, which provides the framework for moving forward with a sense of direction.

It is a living document that will be revised periodically based upon national, regional and global health dynamic policies to be able to properly and timely deliver health services to our people and to appropriately contribute to global public health developments.

We welcome new initiatives in order to strengthen the quality of healthcare services to our people.

In the last decade, Timor-Leste has made steady progress in the health sector including the reconstruction of health facilities, expansion of community based health services like the integrated community health services, and a considerable number of national medical graduates have joined the health work force and are serving communities across our nation, in particular in the more rural and remote areas.

Nevertheless, there is a need for renewed focus on communicable diseases such as dengue and TBC that still pose public health challenges to the country. Focus is also required to address the rising level of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases that are among the ten leading causes of death.

We also need to increase health services for persons with disabilities, in particular those with mental disabilities.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

Timor-Leste attaches great importance to the contributions made by the international community to our health sector but also to our overall development journey towards future prosperity.

Timor-Leste ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2004 and domestically we finally started to take concrete steps towards tobacco control and consumption in Timor-Leste.

We are actively engaged in an anti-tobacco national campaign that is starting to get the message across to our people. In May this year, for example, an executive order was issued to all line ministries banning smoking in public spaces, including public transportation, followed one month later, by a decision of the Chair of the Civil service Commission reinforcing the prohibition of smoking in all public administration working environment. We are now receiving encouraging messages from schools in remote areas such as in Baguia, in the Eastern region of the country, saying that teachers are no longer smoking inside the classrooms.

In this regard, I also congratulate the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Knut Ostby and WHO's Representative, Dr. Rajesh Pandav for making the United Nations compound in Timor-Leste a tobacco free zone.

These are all positive steps we are taking in Timor-Leste but the implementation of the FCTC agreement needs to be accelerated.

Timor-Leste has one of the highest tobacco consumption rates in the world with over 70% of Timorese men using tobacco. This is a tragic and unacceptable figure for the type of prosperous nation we strive to become. Tobacco is present on our streets, it is in our homes, it is advertised on our kiosks and it is present in our schools.

As a Party to the WHO's Framework Convention for Tobacco Control, Timor-Leste must adopt comprehensive tobacco control laws including the prohibition of illicit trade in tobacco products.

I am happy to share with you that the Decree Law that will allow us to take concrete legal and policy measures to control tobacco consumption and sales in Timor-Leste is circulating within the Government for comments prior to being tabled at the Council of Ministers for approval. I will make sure this will happen shortly so that we can put a halt to Timor-Leste being exploited through weak legislation.

I understand that the FCTC is on the agenda of this Regional Committee and will be discussed.

We must achieve regional political will that will enable our region to bring down the rates of consumption of tobacco and tobacco products. I am sure we are all concerned with the rising trend of consumption of tobacco in our younger generations and how this will affect the future prosperity of our nations and of our region.

All of us, who are here representing our nations agreed also through the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005, to build our capacity to detect, assess and report public health events, towards ensuring greater global health security.

None of us would like an event, similar to the unfortunate Ebola outbreak that has hit the African continent the hardest, or the earthquakes in Nepal and the spread of MERS Coronavirus, to take place in any of our own countries or in our region. These

types of events have devastating effects, which a nation like Timor-Leste would struggle to cope with. Nevertheless these events take place, and we must be ready.

In this regard, I am very happy to inform that just last week in our Council of Ministers meeting we decided to donate US\$100,000 to WHO's South East Asia regional emergency fund. This is a modest contribution which can be taken as a signal of our commitment to the needs of the region.

In addition to emergency readiness, we need to take particular measures at our ports, airports and ground crossings to mitigate the spread of health risks into our nations and also to our neighbouring countries.

At this WHO regional committee meeting we will also be advocating for health in the post-2015 Global Sustainable Development Goals, and how we can domestically as well as nation-to-nation, be able to expand more effective health services with stronger health workforces.

For nations like Timor-Leste this is very important. We cannot just wait for our own health sector to develop overnight. Even if it did we would lack the maturity most of you already have.

We will need to make better use of regional health services to ensure we keep our population healthy, whilst at the same time building our own health infrastructure and cadres, so that in the future, it is your people that come to Timor-Leste to access our future state of the art health care services.

We have to be able to aim for this kind of health services reciprocity in our region.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

When I took the helm of this VI Government and during my many interventions so far I often close with the moto 'Um Por Todos e Todos Por Um', meaning "One For All and All For One".

It is my strong belief that "we can do better by working together" and I am encouraged to see so many of our regional health leaders in one room to discuss how we can keep our region prosperous and healthy.

I would like to once again thank the Honorable Ministers and distinguished delegates from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste for coming, and I look forward to positive and constructive deliberations that will benefit us all.

I wish you a memorable stay in Dili, and if you have time, please visit other parts of our amazing Timor-Leste.

Venho solicitar a tradução dos documentos em anexo para língua portuguesa

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen:

I hereby declare the Sixty-eighth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia open.

Thank you.

Dr Rui Maria de Araújo
Dili, 07 September 2015