



PRESIDENCY OF THE  
**COUNCIL OF  
MINISTERS**

EIGHT CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT



Office of the  
Spokesperson

September 25, 2019

**Press release**

**Statement of sorrow on the death of Father João de Deus Pires**

It is with enormous consternation and great regret that the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste received the news of the death of Father João de Deus Pires, a Salesian missionary, on September 22 of 2019, at the Guido Valadares National Hospital in Dili.

Born in Morais, Macedo de Cavaleiros, Portugal, he was ordained a priest in 1956, and was sent to Timor-Leste in 1957.

From 1957 to the present day, he remained here, where he developed an intense and very varied educational and missionary activity, overcoming difficulties of all kinds and supporting great setbacks during the period of Indonesian occupation.

His role will be remembered in the history of Timor-Leste, during the Indonesian occupation, at a time when the support bases fell, Father João de Deus dedicated all his efforts to providing care to the population that was captured and surrendered, and was facing, in the years of 1979 and 1980, the most precarious situations of hunger and disease.

After the reorganization of the fight in March 1981, where the new "national unity" policy was able to shake the consciences and clarify the new nationalist concepts and ideals, Father João de Deus did all he could, including even facing threats on the part of the occupant, to maintain a close link between the mountains (the top leadership of the Struggle) and Dili, through which it was possible to send correspondence to the outside world.



Palácio do Governo,  
Avenida Presidente Nicolau Lobato,  
Dili, Timor-Leste



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Father João de Deus was exemplary in the treatment he gave to the couriers, at the time known as "boxes", instilling in them selflessness, a spirit of sacrifice and responsibility.

The agents of the clandestine networks cannot and will never forget the altruistic spirit of this missionary and great fighter for the freedom of the Timorese people, with whom he undertook to serve, as a priest, as Portuguese and as a humanist.

In the last years of his life, he took on the greater importance of welcoming the most vulnerable, assisting them in accommodation, social assistance and food, as well as in affection, education and the possibility of progressing in the intellectual formation in a healthy environment, enabling studies at the top level and the preparation of young people for active life.

Due to his extreme dedication, he earned respect, admiration and even the veneration of the Timorese people, contributing in a remarkable way to his evangelization and to the consolidation of the Salesian presence in Timor.

In May 2012, the late priest was decorated by the President of the Republic, with the Medal of the Order Dom Martinho Lopes, for his support for the Timorese resistance and relevant contribution to the struggle for independence.

At this moment of so much grief for the religious and the Timorese people in general, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste presents its deepest condolences to the family of the esteemed Father João de Deus, the Catholic Church and the Salesian family of Timor-Leste. **ENDS**



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