



PRIME
MINISTER

**SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
TO OPEN TIMOR-LESTE'S INAUGURAL PAVILION AT LA BIENNALE
DI VENEZIA**

Timor-Leste Pavilion, Venice, Italy
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Palácio do Governo
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a special privilege to be here to open Timor-Leste's first exhibition at la Biennale di Venezia.

Twenty-five years after the Timorese people voted in a United Nations' sponsored referendum to restore our independence, we are proud to participate for the first time in the world's premiere visual arts event.

Our path to independence was long and difficult. But we would not have been able to achieve our freedom without first having a strong sense of national identity.

Over centuries we developed a unique culture, heritage and spirit. The stories of our ancestors continue to echo throughout our ancient land. These stories guide us and bring us together as a people.

It was our distinct culture and heritage that unified the Timorese during our resistance struggle and fuelled our dreams of freedom.

Since independence, our culture and our storytelling have been an integral part of our peace-building and our State building efforts.

And today, we are a free, open and democratic nation.

Now it is time to promote our culture to the world. Our painting, sculpture, weaving, craft, our theatre and film and our dance and music. We want our rich cultural heritage to underpin the development of our tourism industry and create jobs for our people.

Just six months ago, last October, I appointed Jorge Soares Cristóvão Timor-Leste's inaugural Venice Biennale Commissioner.

And here we are today! It is a remarkable achievement.

By opening this exhibition Timor-Leste is making a statement that our art, culture and heritage matter.

Our stories and our culture define who we are. But just as nations evolve, so does national culture. Art cannot just be about the past – it must also embrace the future and the potential of our country.

The art of Maria Madeira incorporates the timeless traditions of our people in contemporary works of truth-telling and beauty.

She uses materials that define our land and our heritage - red earth, betel nut and tais – to tell a story of resistance, resilience, and renewal.

Maria speaks to the universal experience of women in war.

The stories of occupation can be difficult to tell. Maria is able to capture the darkness of war as well as the power of reconciliation and the possibilities of hope.

I would like to congratulate Timor-Leste's inaugural Venice Biennale Commissioner, the Secretary of State for Arts and Culture, Jorge Soares Cristóvão and his team for making Timor-Leste's participation in la Biennale di Venezia such a beautiful reality.

I also congratulate the Minister of Youth, Sports, Art and Culture, Nélio Isaac Sarmento for his steadfast support for Timor-Leste's exhibition.

I would also like to thank the curator, Natalie King, for doing such a wonderful job and all the people who have worked so hard to support this exhibition.

I know that this exhibition will be an inspiration to Timorese artists and will promote the development of contemporary art.

While this is the first time our country is participating in la Biennale di Venezia, we look forward to many more exhibitions in the future to celebrate our nation and share our stories with the world.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão