



PRIME
MINISTER

**SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
TIMOR-LESTE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS
MEETING (TLDPM)**

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão Hall, Ministry of Finance, Dili
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Palácio do Governo
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

Your Excellency the Speaker of Parliament, Ms Maria Fernanda Lay

Your Excellency the President of the Court of Appeal, Mr Deolindo dos Santos

Distinguished Members of Parliament

Distinguished Members of Government

Your Excellencies the Ambassadors and Representatives from International Organisations and Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Your Excellencies the Representatives from Non-Governmental Organisations and Religious Communities

Dear Members of the Press

Ladies and gentlemen,

First and foremost, allow me to extend a warm welcome to all participants in this annual meeting with Timor-Leste's Development Partners.

The first of these meetings – the Donors' Conference for Timor-Leste – took place 25 years ago in Tokyo, Japan, with the support of the UN and the World Bank.

It was in the aftermath of the vote for independence, amidst a severe humanitarian crisis in Timor-Leste, and various donor countries mobilised to raise aid for the Timorese people.

It was 25 years ago that more than 78% of Timorese chose independence in the Popular Consultation of 30 August 1999, organised by the United Nations.

It was 25 years ago that thousands of Timorese found themselves displaced, injured, or fleeing – culminating a period of 24 years of occupation and suffering with more turmoil and anguish.

Twenty-five years may seem like a long time, but it remains little more than a second in the life of our people.

And each day since 30 August 1999 has been a day of overcoming and victory against countless challenges faced by the women, men, and children of this nation.

This year we celebrate this victory of freedom and independence, but we also remember and honour the martyrs of our struggle and the sacrifices made by the Timorese people.

This year we celebrate the numerous achievements made in democracy and peace. However, we also recognise that much remains to be done to overcome poverty, inequality, unemployment, food insecurity, as well as global challenges such as climate change, economic uncertainties, and global instability.

Yet, throughout the process of achieving independence and consolidating our State and Nation, we have not been alone. The development partners – our partners – have joined our development process.

Since the 1999 donors' conference, where millions of US dollars were raised to support the transition period, many more millions have been employed in building our State, in the form of cash, goods, and technical assistance.

Therefore, today, in this plenary session that brings together the senior representatives of Timor-Leste's development partners, I must convey my utmost gratitude.

And this comes at a time when so many other people need the solidarity and help of the International Community. From Syria to Yemen, from the people of Palestine to the people of Myanmar, from the Ukrainian people to the Sahrawi people – so many nations, some forgotten, in their silent struggle for freedom and dignity!

In times that will never be forgotten, we Timorese also had the feeling that our destinies did not belong to us. We were, in fact, subjugated to global circumstances and interests.

However, Timor-Leste is now a success story in the history of international law.

May this success and our stability, peace, and democracy inspire the International Community not to give up when the highest principles of justice, human rights, and human development are at stake.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen,

I return to the topic that brings us together today: the future of Timor-Leste.

The Government must provide a clear vision and direction for the next five years. This vision will allow development partners to align their priorities within their Strategic Cooperation Programmes.

The Programme of the Ninth Constitutional Government has set the commitments for the next five years, sustained by a long-term vision for the country.

Today, we are aware of our weaknesses, we have drawn our own plan, and we know where we want to go.

The involvement of our partners remains crucial, but the leadership and ownership of these commitments are increasingly the responsibility of the Timorese State, with renewed confidence in the reforms that enable the fulfilment of these commitments.

This first year of governance, since the Ninth Constitutional Government took office last July, has been a year of analysis and evaluation of the processes and projects we inherited from the previous administration, aimed at correcting irregularities that led the country to a period of stagnation.

We want to get back on track with a solid foundation of transparency, increased internal capacity, and better management and execution capabilities. This will enable us to make the most of the international assistance we receive.

Therefore, we are reviewing, empowering, and improving the institutions that guarantee development, by investing in justice, transparency, and efficiency of procedures. Only in this way will it be possible to overcome barriers and strengthen the State, and especially the financial system.

The Government has approved the carrying out of internal audits of the Ministries, with the support of an international institution. National Parliament itself has approved an audit of the Court of Auditors. This effort will also be extended to the National Parliament and the Special Administrative Region of Oe-Cusse Ambeno.

We believe that financial audits of fundamental institutions in a state under the rule of law are essential to correct weaknesses and comply with the rules imposed by law. We want to start a new phase in the development and consolidation of Timorese democracy, where good governance and accountability of public institutions are a principle, a means, and an end of institutional culture.

This is, therefore, the summary of the first year of governance: to restore the integrity of public bodies, improve the services provided, and restore the legitimacy and trust of the Timorese people, the private sector, and Development Partners.

A year of reforms, from the justice sector to a review of legislation, including the new procurement regime and improvement of the system for planning, monitoring, and evaluating public activities.

This includes a detailed examination of all major investment projects, with a cost-benefit analysis, to ensure that proper planning and preliminary studies were conducted and that the planned funding is indeed the most appropriate.

Only in this way can we embark on the chosen path of economic diversification and job creation to meet modern challenges and support a young and rapidly growing population.

We have the benefit of possessing natural resources, but we must put all our effort into escaping the “resource curse” by building bridges that create a solid link between natural resources and progress. We must also create policies for energy transition rather than continuing on a path that may become unsustainable.

This means implementing the measures provided for in the *Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030*, including investment in social capital, infrastructure development, and economic development, as discussed over the past two days leading up to today’s meeting.

Today, that's why I want to emphasise the importance of these last two days of sectoral coordination meetings for the pillars of the SDP. These technical discussions have allowed us to better inform this plenary so that the cooperation and investment of our partners are aligned with the goals of the Government's programme - a programme that is oriented towards the people and communities of Timor-Leste.

At this stage of Timor-Leste's development, I think it's important to emphasise that the Development Partners are in full harmony with the government, adapting their grants and technical assistance to the priorities set by the Government. Your priorities must be our priorities. Your solutions to the problems and challenges facing the country must be our solutions - in a true collective effort of coordination.

We will accelerate strategic policies, such as the decentralisation process, moving from the legal framework to action so that public services reach all Timorese citizens quickly and efficiently.

We will also invest in new policies, such as promoting the Blue Economy with an economic model that brings communities closer to the ocean and brings Timor-Leste closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Government is preparing a Policy and Action Plan for the Blue Economy for discussion in the Council of Ministers and subsequent public consultation. In due course, Development Partners will also be invited to contribute to this vision and its priorities.

Moreover, we will revisit the development of Oe-Cusse, having already created an executive committee with a view to establishing a Special Economic Zone of Development in Oe-Cusse Ambeno, aiming to present a detailed study at the start of next year.

In terms of major investments, we expect the submarine fibre optic cable installation project to be completed by the end of the year. This is a crucial infrastructure that will boost the private sector and facilitate the social and economic development of the population.

In the coming years, total priority will continue to be given to the health and education sectors, so as to improve these essential public services.

We have approved the Integrated Health Plan, combining various health programmes into a single plan to provide coordinated and comprehensive primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare across the national territory. We will create mechanisms to ensure universal health coverage, even in areas where access is more difficult, maximising efforts and efficiency, transparency, and professionalism in the management of financial, human, material, and logistical resources, as well as health infrastructure and equipment.

In the education sector, we will continue to work to ensure quality education for all children and young people, starting with the evaluation of teachers and the development of a Candidate Pool to fill vacancies and needs based on capacity and merit. We have also approved the Draft Law on the Higher Education Framework Law, which, after more than 14 years of the Basic Education Law coming into force, needed an update in light of the current demands and challenges of the country.

The training and capacity building of human resources is a necessity and a priority that cuts across all sectors of governance and I know that our Development Partners are aware of this.

We know that people are the true engine of development, whether in increasing agricultural productivity, promoting tourism, growing entrepreneurship, adopting best practices and policies from infrastructure to the provision of social services, and even modernising public institutions.

People - supporting people! From combating child malnutrition to improving school menus, from promoting and valuing women in the labour market and within communities to including and protecting the most vulnerable in our society.

People are our greatest asset, our greatest potential, our greatest hope for a sustainable future. That's why, I say, our country also needs another type of major investment beyond Public-Private-Partnerships, in other words, it needs Partnerships-for-People!

Finally, I must mention the opportunities arising from the signing of the WTO accession protocol. This represents significant progress in trade liberalisation, access to international markets, and opportunities created by Timor-Leste's integration into the global economy.

We continue to make every effort to negotiate accession to ASEAN. It is not enough to join this association; Timor-Leste must ensure the effective fulfilment of the commitments assumed on joining. We have relied and will continue to rely, once again, on Development Partners, in preparing the various political, administrative, and legislative instruments, as well as in the capacity building of our human resources.

We assume with responsibility, but also as a tremendous opportunity, the full integration into this space, which is increasingly assuming a greater global economic and strategic role.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen,

Timor-Leste, as a founding member of the g7+, has often faced the difficulties experienced by the world's most fragile and poor countries in accessing financial aid.

We repeatedly stress that international organisations must carefully assess the specificities and needs of countries so that aid priorities match the actual needs of those countries.

I remind you of the "International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding" that took place in Dili in 2010, where for the first time fragile and conflict-affected states organised themselves to have a united voice on the global stage.

From this dialogue emerged the "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States" launched in 2011 at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan. The country-owned and country-led global

mechanism to monitor on and draw attention to the unique challenges faced by fragile states continues to be actively defended by the g7+, and by Timor-Leste.

Support from development partners cannot fail to take into account the specific challenges and objectives defined by each country. Only in this way can support, in the form of technical assistance and other possible modalities, be effective and positive, with concrete results.

Once again, I would like to thank the development partners for their work in Timor-Leste over all of these years.

I am confident that we can continue to count on your support to implement our strategic vision for the development of our people and our country.

Thank you very, very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão