



PRIME
MINISTER

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

ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIDE EVENT

**“SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR ZERO HUNGER IN SMALL ISLANDS AND
DEVELOPING STATES”**

(DELIVERED BY H.E. THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND COOPERATION)

Room 3, American University of Antigua
St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda
28 May 2024

Excellencies
Distinguished speakers
Dear friends,

It is with great honour that I welcome you today to this significant side event on the margins of the Conference on Small Island Developing States, hosted by the Government of Timor-Leste in partnership with the government of Chile, the g7+ and the United Nations World Food Programme.

Together we have come together under the Global Task Force on social protection for nutrition, human capital, and local economic development.

Our discussion today, on "*Social Protection for Zero Hunger in Small Islands and Developing States*," could not be more timely or crucial.

As many of you are aware, Small Island Developing States like Timor-Leste face unique challenges that result from our geographical isolation, our vulnerability to natural disasters, and our heavy dependence on imports for essential items such as food and energy.

These inherent characteristics contribute to structural vulnerabilities that hinder sustainable development and are further exacerbated by climate crises and extreme weather events.

It is in this context that we face the great challenge of addressing malnutrition.

Today, we gather not just to discuss these challenges but to explore transformative solutions through government-led and driven social protection systems.

Our focus today aligns closely with Sustainable Development Goal 2 – Zero Hunger – which demonstrates our collective commitment to eradicating hunger and improving nutrition by 2030.

Social protection is not merely a safety net for the vulnerable but a foundation for development. It provides direct support to address poverty and provides access to essential services like healthcare and education.

By investing in our youth, ensuring they have access to quality education, healthcare, and nutrition, we are not only addressing immediate essential needs but we

are also laying the groundwork for our future development, where the promises of independence and peace are being realised.

It is our responsibility to break the cycle of poverty, hunger and malnutrition and build a sustainable future for our nations.

Dear friends,

Fragile nations must have their voices heard in this dialogue. Fragile and conflict-affected nations have faced the devastating consequences of conflict firsthand. The conflict has consumed our resources, disrupted our economies, and left our people hungry.

Small Island Nations, including those within the g7+ group, have endured decades of conflict that have eroded their resilience to other shocks.

With limited arable land, scarce fresh water, and a reliance on imported food, Small Island States are hit hardest by the global food crises driven by geopolitical and geoeconomic fragmentation.

There are resources, knowledge, and technology to achieve zero hunger. What we need is the political will and global solidarity to turn this vision into reality. Let us commit to peace, harness our collective strength, and ensure that no one, anywhere in the world, goes to bed hungry.

That is why we are all here today to share best practices, innovative solutions, and lessons learned from across various SIDS.

We aim to facilitate a rich exchange of knowledge and to collaborate on developing practical strategies that enhance the effectiveness of social protection in mitigating the challenges we face.

This dialogue is about turning our shared vulnerabilities into shared strengths.

I thank each one of you for your presence and your commitment to this cause. Let us work together to ensure that social protection becomes a catalyst for sustainable development in our communities.

Together, we can achieve a future where no one is left behind, and every child, woman, and man in our islands has the opportunity to lead a healthy, productive life.

Let us be bold in our aspirations and resolute in our actions to see and live in a world free of hunger and malnutrition.

Thank you.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão