



PRIME
MINISTER

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNDP SIDE EVENT
BLUER, GREENER & BETTER FOR SMALL ISLAND
DEVELOPING STATES**

**‘Nature-Positive Solutions for Sustainable Development in
Timor-Leste’**

St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda
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Excellency, Prime Minister of Samoa, Fiame Naomi Mata'afa

Excellency, UNDP Regional Director, Michelle Muschett

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear friends,

Timor-Leste is a Small Island Developing State that stands at the crossroads of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

Despite our distance apart, Small Island Developing States are bound by common challenges, which ignite the purpose that brings us together today to discuss and chart a collective way forward.

Excellencies, distinguished guests,

As a new nation of the international community, since 2002, we emerged as a champion of reconciliation and as a leading democracy in our region.

However, like many SIDS, Timor-Leste faces challenges posed by geography, remoteness, limited access to the global economy and markets, and extreme vulnerability to natural disasters, including the effects of climate change.

In 2002, we had to build our nation from the ashes. State building and peacebuilding are difficult and we made many missteps on the road to development.

However, Timor-Leste is acutely aware of the importance of sustainable development.

We are mindful of the delicate balance between economic progress and environmental preservation.

As a Small Developing State, sometimes it feels that we have so many challenges that we don't know where to start. However, we know that nothing is a priority if everything is a priority.

We understand that economic growth is essential for our stability and sovereignty.

This morning in the remarks of the UNSG, he mentioned that the current global financial system is failing to deliver for developing countries, particularly SIDS.

This is the real challenge that SIDS face.

The best example of the economic constraints that we face was when, this morning, in the following session "*The Interactive Dialogue on Revitalising SIDS Economies for Accelerated and Sustainable Growth*" the Chairs of the event allowed the representatives of the developed countries to speak for more than one hour about their promises, while to the SIDS – that wanted to talk about their needs and concerns – was allocated only three minutes each before cutting the microphone off, not allowing them to express their perspectives.

And this is a Conference for SIDS. This is a good example of the relationship between developed countries, donors and institutions and the developing countries, including SIDS.

This means that the principle of the "country-lead, country-owned" principle will not be taken into account!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Back to the theme "Bluer, Greener, and Better for SIDS", we understand the pressure we have put on our ocean and our planet.

We are in the middle of a climate crisis, and our existence is at risk. Rising sea levels and ocean acidification affect our marine ecosystems and our livelihoods.

As we all know, it is not SIDS that are responsible for the climate crisis. We are made up of 39 States around the world, but we have contributed less than one per cent of the global greenhouse gas emissions. But it is SIDS that are paying the highest price.

We believe that protecting and preserving the marine environment and our planet should not come at the cost of the livelihoods of people in our countries living in extreme poverty.

Yesterday, I said that we are recognised as the Small Island States, but if we think together, if we have a mission and a commitment, together will be the "Great Ocean States", not the Small Island States.

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We are fortunate that Timor-Leste's seas offer enormous potential.

In our pristine waters, our coral reefs are among the most biodiverse in the world. We also have one of the world's highest concentrations of cetaceans as well as an annual migration of blue whales along our coast.

While our seas provide great economic opportunities, we have an obligation to harness this potential responsibly to safeguard the environment and its biodiversity.

And so, Timor-Leste is committed to developing a sustainable blue economy.

To achieve this, we are preparing a comprehensive Blue Economy Policy and Action Plan – a roadmap defining our aspirations and identifying priorities to achieve a sustainable ocean economy.

Ataúro Marine Park

Our headline initiative is the establishment of Ataúro Island as a Marine Park. We are a member of the Coral Triangle Initiative, where we can see already some destruction, essentially caused by tourism. That is why we want to open to tourism but in a sustainable way.

This will work to both conserve the island's internationally significant marine environment while building a sustainable blue economy to provide jobs for our people.

Ataúro Island will become a centre for scientific research and marine conservation anchored in community engagement and empowerment.

We are committed also to do what we can do to protect at least 70% of the coastal area of the mainland.

However, we know that as a SIDS the path forward is fraught with challenges. We will need to conduct scientific research and biodiversity studies, develop infrastructure to protect our tropical reefs, and develop frameworks for the governance of a blue economy. We cannot do this alone.

This underscores precisely why the United Nations established the Conference on Small Island Developing States to promote and enhance cooperation between developed and developing countries and between developing countries. Effective cooperation and partnership are imperative for SIDS to address their unique circumstances.

I will stop now, as I believe a picture can tell a thousand words.

And so, it is with pride and humility that I announce Timor-Leste's intention to establish Ataúro Island as a marine park and invite you to scan the QR code in the room of a short video illustrating the beauty beneath our waters and the resilience that defines the spirit of our people.

I would like to conclude by saying that we are counting on all your support so that together we can achieve our vision.

Thank you.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão