



**P R I M E
M I N I S T E R**

**PUBLIC LECTURE BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO**

**AT THE INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN
RELATIONS**

**‘INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY IN AN INCREASINGLY
FRAGMENTED AND FRAGILE WORLD’**

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Good afternoon and Salam Sejahtera

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a profound honour to stand here today at the esteemed Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR), a centre of excellence in diplomatic training and strategic thought.

Your dedication to fostering understanding and preparing leaders for the complexities of international relations has made IDFR a vital institution, not only for Malaysia but for our entire region.

Timor-Leste greatly values our collaboration with ASEAN and the opportunities afforded to our diplomats and officials to train here, equipping them with the skills to navigate an increasingly complex and fragile global environment.

The challenges of diplomacy today are as daunting as they are necessary for us to face.

History teaches us that every age brings its share of uncertainties, conflicts, and crises.

Just as with Malaysians, the turns of history have had a dramatic impact on the lives of the Timorese people. These turns have included decolonisation, occupation, the Cold War and its chaotic end, the Asian Financial Crisis and the fall of the Indonesian regime, the Restoration of Independence and the challenges of peace building and State building.

I see many young people in the audience today and we can all imagine the dramatic turns in history you will experience in your life.

IDFR provides us a vital service, not only by fostering discussions about the international challenges we face, but also emphasising the importance

of preparation and strategic foresight. It reminds us that the future belongs to those who dare to be ready for it.

Today, I want to begin by recalling an event that many considered improbable – the birth of a free Timor-Leste.

Our history is a testament to resilience, determination and the power of diplomacy.

Like most Southeast Asian nations, our past was marked by centuries of European colonialism, followed by a difficult transition to independence.

During the centuries of Portuguese rule, our people struggled against colonial overreach, including during periods of revolt and resistance.

And then, in 1974, after the Carnation Revolution, this year marks 50 years, Portugal began granting self-determination to its colonies. This opened the possibilities for our future.

However, this was at a time of high international political tension in Southeast Asia. The war in Vietnam was raising Western fears of the spread of communism and a year later, in April 1975, Saigon fell and communist governments came to power in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

It was against this political backdrop that we decided to take control of our destiny, and on 28 November 1975, we made a unilateral declaration of independence.

Nine days later Indonesia invaded our country, after being given the green light by the United States and Australia.

Our people were forsaken by the major western powers that remained silent or supported our annexation. For 24 long years, we waged a seemingly impossible fight, ill equipped and outnumbered, against a giant that was supplied with arms by its Western allies.

Yet we had something greater than weaponry: we had a dream. A dream that had been carried in the hearts of our ancestors and passed down through generations, a dream that inspired us to continue the guerilla campaign through the mountains and valleys of Timor.

While our people stood firm and our guerrilla fighters endured hardships on the battlefield, others took up a different fight – on the diplomatic front, as was their duty. They carried our cause to the United Nations, to the capitals of the world, and to the ears of those with the courage to listen.

We defied the odds, challenged the path history seemed to dictate, and relied on the bravery of individuals and nations who stood with us. These allies risked their own standing to support our people, even when it meant opposing the policies of their own governments.

It was through leading with diplomacy that we were able to secure an independence referendum for our country in which our people bravely exercised their right to self-determination.

While many individuals contributed to the achievement of Timorese freedom, we must give particular credit to Kofi Annan who was a giant of diplomacy. Kofi Annan was man of great humanity who guided the United Nations with a sense of purpose and who was determined to ensure that the Timorese people were given control over their own destiny.

After we voted for independence, we faced the task of re-building a traumatised and impoverished society destroyed by years of war.

And yet, we understood that the only way forward was with peace and reconciliation.

Tolerance overcame vengeance. Forgiveness overcame hatred.

We knew that independence, and the sacrifices of our people, would have no value, and that we could not achieve social harmony, if the hearts of the Timorese were filled with hatred and the desire for revenge.

Through our experience we understood that we would be unable to build our nation if the seeds of hatred and mistrust were planted in our society.

Reconciliation was our prerequisite for national stability, which was in turn a requirement for development.

Yet, we know that each nation has its own context, its own history, its own culture.

However, I believe that all people yearn for the same thing, to live in peace and harmony.

This is why I believe that dialogue is so important – dialogue within every nation and international dialogue respecting the sovereignty of each country, where the powerful do not seek to impose their interests on the weak and the vulnerable.

What sets us apart as human beings is our deep ability to care, to show compassion, and to find strength in diversity. These qualities are the foundation of peace, progress, and justice.

And so, our story is one of hope, resilience, and the unshakable belief that justice can prevail, no matter how overwhelming the odds may seem.

It is a reminder that even in the darkest of times, dreams can light the way to freedom.

As we have seen, in each era, diplomacy emerges as the most effective alternative to war and discord, a mechanism to build bridges and create pathways to peace.

Today, diplomacy is needed more than ever.

We face crises across the globe, exposing the fragility of our rules-based international order. One of the starkest examples is the ongoing tragedy in Gaza – a reminder of what happens when diplomacy fails.

The situation in Gaza underscores the dire consequences of neglecting long-standing conflicts. The failure to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue has created a cycle of despair and violence, devastating civilian lives and eroding international norms. The situation in Gaza not only illustrates the collapse of international law but also exposes the hypocrisy of the West.

We were recently encouraged by the announcement a couple of days ago of a ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel. As we know from the history of this particular conflict, ceasefires are fragile and there are already reports of each side accusing the other of violating the terms of the agreement.

I was invited to Geneva for the Ukraine Peace Summit. When I attended, I felt deeply encouraged and motivated. Over 24 years around 250,000 Timorese people died. In the case of Ukraine, every minute you can see and hear more kids crying, more death, and more suffering of the Ukrainian people. At the Summit, they were all talking about peace, the need for peace, however, many of us left disappointed. This is because it was not a Ukraine Peace Summit, it was a Ukraine War Summit. There was no talk about the need for dialogue, the need for reconciliation. Instead, what we heard was – ‘we will give more money, go buy weapons’. The Summit was an exercise to reaffirm the willingness to continue the war, to win the war, without thought for the suffering of the people. So when I say that international law is not working well – it is because of cases such as this.

Of course, ceasefires do not mean peace but rather an end to violence to allow some breathing room for political negotiations to take place. This can only occur when we move from hostility and mistrust to tolerance and reconciliation.

At the summit, a journalist asked me. What do you think of peace in Ukraine? I said, Ukraine and Russia must be sitting at the same table.

That is why we here, in Southeast Asia, please, young people, have a dream: we all have to build a world without war, a world of peace. We hope that when you raise up you build a world with peace and harmony. Because the state of the world today shows just how fragile and elusive peace can be.

The growing tide of intolerance and extremism, often cloaked under the guise of nationalism, continues to threaten the very fabric of our shared humanity.

And while the world focuses on Gaza and Ukraine, we must not forget rising conflict and unrest across the globe. From the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Sudan and Yemen, to Haiti and, in our own region.

A few years ago, I was invited by FAO to visit Milan.

They told me, “We have food, and we have land to plant. So, what is the problem?”

I told them, “in Africa, particularly northern Africa, people are migrating to Europe, with countless lives lost in the Mediterranean Sea. Why? I asked the leaders to think about this. Why? They have lot of land, they can grow rice and other crops, but they are dying of hunger, and so they are trying to get a place in Europe, to have somewhere to live. Why?”

The answer is conflict.

The international community, instead of acting to solve conflicts, talks more of how they can help the survivors of the mediterranean. They don't see the real cause of the problem. And more, if in a country there is oil and gas or other valuable resources, they provide money to different groups to fight each other, while they take everything, as the government of the country is unable to protect the resources it has.

In the Central African Republic, there has been a peacekeeping force for almost three decades, but there has been no peace. Instead, the peacekeepers act in their own interests. A few years ago, it was even proven that mafia organised crime gave diamonds to the peacekeeping forces which they smuggled to Europe.

We are in a very, very disordered world.

As the developed countries pursue industrialisation and economic growth with little regard for the environment, it is developing countries, especially Small Island Developing States and the Least Developed Countries, that are now most vulnerable to climate change.

As diplomats, it will be a challenge but a necessity to manage the rise of China and make sure that our countries are not drawn into the geo-strategic competition between China and the United States.

And we must do this in the context of the rise of middle powers and the transition to a multi-polar world.

This transition to a multi-polar world is becoming even more complex with the rise of nationalism, isolationism, and global disorder. And with all this change and fragility, we must also face the challenge off technological advances and the rise of artificial intelligence. We are paradoxically

witnessing how the misuse of social media fosters division, spreads misinformation, and amplifies hatred. It will be important that we work to make sure that Artificial Intelligence becomes a force for good in the world, and not a tool of division, oppression, and surveillance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the Timorese resistance struggle, we had a major force on the side of our people: international law and the international system.

Today, in this fragmented and fragile world, and with the collapse of international law, the effectiveness of our global institutions is coming into question.

With international institutions struggling, regional cooperation offers constructive pathways for international cooperation and the consolidation of peace.

We have seen ASEAN successfully foster peace, cooperation, and economic growth in a dynamic region with great diversity.

Timor-Leste is proud to share in this vision.

As a small nation, we know that we cannot 'go it alone' in our region.

And we understand the strength of regional solidarity and want to contribute to peace and sustainable development.

Dear friends,

Timor-Leste is also a proud member of the g7+, a coalition of fragile and conflict-affected states committed to building resilience through mutual support and shared learning.

Our journey from conflict to nationhood has taught us that development cannot be achieved in isolation.

It requires robust institutions, inclusive governance, and effective diplomacy.

Diplomacy, for us, is not just about high-level negotiations. It is about listening, learning, sharing experiences and acting in ways that make a difference on the ground.

Diplomacy should lead the way, carrying the torch of empathy and respect, reminding us of what unites us rather than what divides us.

The g7+ has shown how fragile states can unite to amplify their voices on the international stage.

By working together, we have highlighted the importance of country-led solutions and the need for global policies that respect the unique situations of each country.

Diplomacy has been our tool for turning shared vulnerability into collective strength.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we look to the future, we must invest in the next generation of diplomats.

The world needs skilled negotiators, bridge-builders, and advocates for dialogue and reconciliation.

As we face a world of disorder, we need people who can develop a new global vision.

Institutions like IDFR play a critical role in nurturing this talent.

As we confront challenges like climate change, economic inequality, and geo-political conflict, we must remember that diplomacy is our most powerful tool.

It is diplomacy that transforms differences into dialogue, conflicts into cooperation, and aspirations into achievements.

Every diplomat holds a sacred duty to be a messenger of peace and a champion of justice, representing the very best of what it means to be human.

Dear Friends,

The challenges we face today require collective effort.

Regionalism, multilateralism, and diplomacy are not just ideals, they are necessities.

Timor-Leste is committed to playing its part.

Let us remember that diplomacy, at its core, is about hope.

It is about believing in the possibility of a better future and working tirelessly to make it a reality.

Thank you very much for your patience and for listening.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão