



PRIME
MINISTER

**ORATIO SAPIENTIAE BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIXTH GRADUATION CEREMONY
OF THE SÃO JOÃO DE BRITO INSTITUTE (ISJB)**

“GOING WHERE THE NEED IS GREATEST”

Faculty of Education
São João de Brito Higher Education Institute
Multipurpose Hall, Santo Inácio de Loyola College
17 January 2025

Distinguished Rector, Rev. Isaías Abílio Caldas
Excellencies, Vice-Rectors, Members of the Senate and Faculty,

Reverend Fathers and Esteemed Professors,
Dear Graduates and Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, I wish to congratulate the “Los-Viajantes” (graduates) on the journey they have undertaken to reach this moment.

I believe it has been a challenging and demanding path. And yet, it was a necessary one to prepare you for fulfilling your destiny: to serve the nation through your special gift – teaching!

May the new journey upon which you are about to embark – be it professional, personal, or even, like the “pilgrim” Saint Ignatius of Loyola, spiritual – be pursued with courage, ethics, and passion!

Nothing is more rewarding than a life with purpose, aligning your values with your actions. Nothing is more fulfilling than continuing to learn, explore, and contribute to the transformation of the world.

I look forward with great expectation to seeing today’s graduates become tomorrow’s leaders, who will in turn nurture the leaders of future generations, instilling values of “goodness” deeply rooted in your hearts and words.

You will not only be educators but also sources of inspiration. The talent and knowledge you have acquired can have a profound impact on the youth and communities you will serve. Therefore, be the exemplary contribution that Timor-Leste needs in this ongoing process of building our state and nation.

I must also acknowledge the São João de Brito Institute and its entire academic community for their dedication, moral values, and scientific and technical knowledge, delivered with quality and rigour, which they impart to young students – an essential component of our country's progress.

Education is a mission. It is about serving and sharing what one knows. It is about developing the capacity for critical thinking within our society, grounded in values of responsibility and integrity. It is about building the freedom for which our country fought so hard.

As someone who did not have the good fortune of attending university, I feel some sadness that Timorese society has stopped reflecting and thinking critically about issues and ideas. Instead it memorises and regurgitates... listens and repeats... or, sometimes, does not listen and simply complains...

There is much discussion today about access to technology and digital skills, but I wish to emphasise – particularly to the younger generation – that reciting and copying from Google or ChatGPT is not exercising the critical capacity needed to build our country.

Using technology to enhance the efficiency of studies and services is a gift of modern times. However, allowing it to think and work for us is merely a distraction from the challenges that confront us daily in our personal and professional lives.

Thinking critically is essential to combat misinformation and false beliefs; it is vital for problem-solving, decision-making, and personal and professional development.

To think is to grow. And we cannot hope for our country and democracy to grow in a healthy manner if our students, professionals, and future leaders lack critical skills.

Without independent and critical thinking, we cannot build the country we dreamt of, a dream achieved through sacrifices that remain vivid in our collective memory.

Last year, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Popular Consultation that led to our national independence. We must (STILL) not forget the efforts and sacrifices that our people made for sovereignty.

A significant part of this dream of independence was oriented towards our children and youth, enabling them to grow with the skills to develop themselves and the tools to lead our country towards democratic consolidation and sustainable economic growth.

For this reason, every graduation ceremony held in our young country is a victory to be celebrated. It is a blessing, a hope... a hope for a better future.

The education, training, or capacity-building of Timorese human resources are indispensable factors for the sustainable development of the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear Graduates,

Centuries of colonisation and decades of occupation have left indelible marks that continue to impact the development of our human resources. Only 23 years ago, we were building all the public and private institutions of the country, including educational and training institutions.

There are linguistic and cultural challenges rooted in our history that hinder foundational education and lifelong professional capacity-building. Indeed, we remain heavily reliant on technical assistance from specialised professionals from partner countries, with varying linguistic, cultural, and institutional backgrounds.

While this may be viewed as an obstacle, it can also be seen as an opportunity. Adaptability, the experience of learning and working in multicultural contexts, and linguistic flexibility are competitive advantages in both the national and international labour markets. These are skills you must explore and pass on to those you will teach.

On the other hand, the government recognises the need to do more to improve the country's education system, from foundational levels to higher education, not only to enhance the quality of education but also to ensure widespread access to it. This can only be achieved through holistic and cross-sectoral governance.

No sector can fully develop without integrated progress across all areas of governance.

Any education policy, no matter how well-designed, will fail without solid investment in healthcare, as sick and hungry children and young people are unable to attend educational institutions or, if they do attend, their performance will be diminished.

Any education policy, no matter how well-designed, will fail without substantial investment in basic infrastructure. Without roads, electricity, and communications to connect communities to educational institutions, not only is there no access to education, but there are also no effective and productive conditions for the necessary teaching and learning outcomes.

Moreover, political and economic instability, uncertainties, and the lack of consensus and willingness among political leaders to work for the common good hinder the efficient implementation of public policies. Corruption and areas of tension, or even violence and conflict, divert not only energy but also financial resources to urgent actions that are not productive or sustainable in the long term.

We all know that dedicating energy and resources to improving education systems will have a much more favourable effect on collective

development, yet without peace and stability, there are no conditions for development.

We are, therefore, speaking of a set of processes with various stakeholders who seek to identify problems and offer solutions that uphold society's rights, constantly analysing the current circumstances of these processes. In a rule-of-law state like ours, these rights and guarantees are enshrined in our fundamental law: the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

Another aspect I consider fundamental, as we speak of rights and guarantees, concerns issues of inequality and political, social, or individual discrimination. Not having broad and unrestricted access to public policies and the services they establish is to limit the fundamental rights of our society – where we are all equally capable of contributing to the development of the country.

Only when we grant opportunities to all can we combat the inequalities of the whole.

Dear Graduates,

In a developing country like Timor-Leste, with so many needs and limited financial resources, all policies and strategies must be meticulously considered and balanced. Every investment, including in your education, requires resources that may be needed in another sector to help us escape poverty and precariousness more quickly.

Therefore, today, I ask you for humility and responsibility. Serve others, respect people, and contribute to creating harmony and cooperation in your relationships with other young people, as well as with elders, your families, and your communities.

Be true agents of stability and cultivate peace.

Peace is not merely the absence of conflict – peace is also the state of harmony that a community or society nurtures in its daily interactions. It is empathy, and it is “going where the need is greatest,” reaching more “quickly” those who are “furthest away”.

We cannot aspire to build a resilient and prosperous society without intellectual and technical effort, without innovation and creativity, and without empathy and kindness.

May the Catholic and Jesuit values you have acquired at this Institution, combined with your higher education qualifications, enrich Timorese society with kindness and wisdom.

Congratulations, and I wish you every success in your future!

Thank you.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão