



PRIME
MINISTER

**ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT HUNAN UNIVERSITY**

**THE END OF CERTAINTY: THE IMPORTANCE OF
INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN A TIME OF CHANGE AND
DISRUPTION**

Hunan University, China

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Vice-Chancellor
Ladies and Gentlemen
Students

It is a great honour to address you here today at this distinguished place of learning, Hunan University.

Hunan University is one of China's oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher education. As you know, the university traces its origins to the Yuelu Academy, founded in 976 AD during the Song Dynasty. Since then, Hunan University has become a symbol of the Chinese intellectual tradition — a place where scholars have debated philosophy, literature, ethics and governance over centuries.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Hunan University has made a significant political and intellectual contribution to the shaping of modern China. Its revolutionary spirit and encouragement of transformative thought have played an important role in the rise of your great nation.

In this time of uncertainty and disruption, universities are more vital than ever. They are not only places for professional training and learning — they are spaces for deep reflection and critical thinking about the great questions of our time. About how we can know something to be true, about the meaning of our lives and how we should live and about what kind of society we want to build and how we should organise the international community.

Universities provide a sanctuary for revolutionary thought, for questioning established wisdom and for charting a path towards progress in an increasingly complex world.

Hunan University has embraced this spirit. It has produced influential thinkers and leaders who have helped shape China's intellectual and national life.

It has also built strong ties with institutions around the world, contributing to global dialogue and advancing knowledge across borders.

And I am pleased that Hunan University's global engagement has now extended to Timor-Leste.

Many here today may not know much about our country or its history. The story of Timor-Leste is one of sacrifice in our struggle to achieve self-determination — and of reconciliation, to move forward with peace-building and State-building.

The Portuguese landed in our country in 1515 and over time consolidated colonial rule. Apart from a period of Japanese occupation during the Second World War,

Portuguese rule continued until 1975 when the Carnation Revolution led to Portugal departing its colonies. On 28 November 1975, the Timorese declared independence.

Fearing the establishment of a communist State on its borders, Indonesia invaded nine days later. The invasion and the subsequent 24 years of illegal occupation were supported by the West.

The Timorese resisted. I led a brave resistance army in the mountains and valleys of our country. But we were isolated and alone, forsaken by much of the world. We were a small country, fighting a regional power equipped with modern weapons from the West.

Around one third of our population died as a result of the conflict.

And yet, despite suffering through the darkest of times, the Timorese people never gave up their dream of self-determination.

During the occupation, we held onto a firm belief in international law. While we could never defeat Indonesia militarily, we knew international law was on our side. Our resistance was also supported by solidarity groups around the world and we pursued diplomacy with patience and determination.

We found hope when the Suharto regime fell following the economic impact of the Asian Financial Crisis on Indonesia. The new Indonesian President, B.J. Habibie, agreed to allow the Timorese to vote on their future.

In August 1999, the Timorese bravely exercised their right to self-determination and voted overwhelmingly for independence. On 20 May 2002, Timor-Leste was reborn as an independent and sovereign nation.

From the beginning, our new nation gave priority to reconciliation with Indonesia. We understood that the success of our small country depended on friendship and cooperation with our neighbours and on the support of the international community. Our journey since has not been easy and we remain fragile, but we are building our State and working to meet the needs of our people.

I tell you our story not only so that you can learn about our country, but to share the lessons we have learned from our struggle.

We learned the importance of dialogue and international solidarity to achieve peace.

We learned that without peace, there can be no development - and without development, there can be no peace.

And we learned that international law, multilateralism and cooperation are critical to a safe and prosperous world.

Dear students,

Timor-Leste is not alone in learning lessons from the past. Other fragile countries have also experienced conflict and are now struggling to consolidate their institutions and deliver development for their people.

For many of these countries, the promise of development appears out of reach in a global economy that is entrenching extreme inequality. In failing to acknowledge this reality, it has become clear that the West has run out of answers to address global poverty.

And yet, fragile countries remain subject to decisions made by powerful nations — countries that have long dictated how others should be governed. The legacy of Western colonialism runs deep in the structures and assumptions of international relations.

This includes international aid and development, which in many cases has become less about genuine partnership and more about influence — a continuation of an unequal dynamic, with power now exercised through budgets and benchmarks.

That is why Timor-Leste joined with 19 other States to establish the g7+ group of fragile countries. The g7+ provides a platform of solidarity for our nations to speak with one voice to the international community — to demand ownership of our development paths and recognition of the unique challenges we face in building resilient States and sustainable peace.

Last week, the g7+ countries met in Dili to mark the group's 15th anniversary and reflect on its continuing work to advocate for more inclusive and effective international policy.

Timor-Leste's commitment to regional and global solidarity is also why we have applied for membership of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Through international cooperation, ASEAN works to promote peace, security and prosperity in our region and beyond.

And last year, Timor-Leste became a full member of the World Trade Organization, because we believe a rules-based global trading system is essential to peace and shared development.

In this, we have looked to China.

The Chinese economy is now 14 times larger than it was in 2001, when China joined the World Trade Organization. The scale of China's development has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty and reshaped both the global economy and the geo-political order.

China's achievements in infrastructure, innovation and technology are extraordinary. Even since the beginning of this year, China has made great advances in artificial intelligence, electric vehicles, battery technology and space exploration.

For many countries, especially in the developing world, trade with China is a major driver of development and poverty reduction.

China is now the largest trading partner for more than 120 countries. This trade creates jobs, supports industry and provides access to infrastructure and technology.

As China's economic power has grown, so too has its role in international cooperation. It is now a key voice in multilateral forums — including the United Nations, the G20 and the WTO — and it provides development financing through the Belt and Road Initiative, enabling countries to build critical infrastructure.

Importantly, China has advocated for inclusive development — supporting the principle that all countries should be free to shape their own future, without being forced to choose between competing powers.

In a time of global division and uncertainty, this approach has offered an alternative - one based on mutual respect, practical cooperation and a recognition of sovereignty.

Dear students,

We are now entering a period of global uncertainty, disruption and change.

The forces driving change today have been building slowly for many years.

In 2003, we witnessed the invasion of Iraq — a clear violation of international law.

Then in 2008 the Global Financial Crisis exposed the moral bankruptcy of the powerful who run the international economy and who allowed inequality to grow unchecked.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the self-interest of nations and the myth of cooperation, as vaccines were hoarded by the West and the poorest countries were left behind.

And since 2023, we have witnessed once again the disregard for international law in Gaza and the intolerable suffering of the Palestinian people.

While the forces of disruption have been gathering slowly, change is now arriving all at once.

We are seeing the collapse of the international legal, economic and trading systems that have shaped the world since the end of World War II.

In starting an international trade war, the United States is throwing aside global cooperation and threatening the world with economic recession.

As always, in times of turmoil, it is the poorest who suffer the most, including friends from our region. With the highest American tariffs proposed for countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, it will be small and developing nations who are forced to bear the heaviest burden through lost trade and investment, the rising costs of essential goods and the disappearance of jobs.

This will leave already vulnerable communities with fewer resources to face climate shocks, manage debt and invest in development and human welfare.

Regrettably, these actions are damaging international trust, cooperation and development and, all of a sudden, we now face the prospect of a fragmented and re-ordered world.

Dear students

In this time of change, we must work together to build a new model of international solidarity and cooperation.

In today's interconnected world, we need a renewed commitment to multilateralism — so that countries can come together to develop shared responses to global challenges.

We must move beyond the old dynamic, where the strong set the rules but applied them only to others. We must move beyond a model driven by narrow self-interest and focus instead on the needs of the vulnerable and the protection of human dignity.

And we must recognise that fragile countries are not failed countries — they are nations with potential and they must be given the opportunity to develop in ways that reflect their own context, experience and priorities.

In a re-ordered world, we must build a global economy that is inclusive and fair — one that does not entrench inequality but enables the world's least developed countries to prosper on their own terms.

What we need are new certainties. The certainty of dialogue — that we will keep talking, even when we disagree. The certainty of respect — that every nation, no matter how small, has a place and a voice. The certainty of tolerance — that diversity and difference are not threats, but strengths that benefit us all.

In this period of disruption and change, we need global solidarity that recognises our futures are bound together.

Students, the certainties of the past are gone. So now, we look to you — to help build a world that is fairer, safer and more cooperative.

China will play a leading role in shaping this future — in trade, development, economic growth and global governance. It will lead with advances in technology and engineering that we can only dream of today.

As you help lead this change, I urge you to do so with hope, confidence and unity.

After all, it is only through trust, cooperation and international solidarity that we can shape a future that supports all peoples and all nations, in the best interests of our shared humanity.

And it all means:

Community with a shared future among neighboring countries - as Hunan Province is showing to Timor-Leste, in practical actions of solidarity!

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Thank you very much.