



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

**OPENING REMARKS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO**

**DILI DIALOGUE FORUM 2025:
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, MEDIA AND DIGITAL DEMOCRACY**

Dili, 10 May 2025

Excellencies
Ambassadors
Members of international press councils
Journalists
Civil society
Students
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to provide the opening remarks for the Dili Dialogue Forum 2025.

This Forum has become an important national and regional platform for strengthening the role of the media in our societies and discussing critical issues of our time.

It brings together voices from across the media, government, civil society, education and diplomacy to examine how we protect freedom of expression and encourage an informed and active society.

The Press Council should be commended for holding this Forum to encourage dialogue and discussion, as well as for its contribution to freedom of expression and support to democratic State-building in Timor-Leste.

This year's theme - **Artificial Intelligence, Media and Digital Democracy** - is both urgent and complex.

We are living through a period of change. Artificial intelligence is accelerating this change. While AI brings promise, we must also discuss its risks.

Friends,

In fragile and post-conflict countries, the media plays a vital role — not only in providing information to the people, but in shaping the foundations of peace, trust and national identity.

After violence and repression, the creation of an open society and independent media is one of the clearest signs that a country is turning away from fear and control — and embracing transparency, inclusion and democratic governance.

In Timor-Leste, we know from experience what happens when the press is silenced.

Timorese can still remember the censorship and propaganda that our people faced during the occupation. Truth was suppressed and people were silenced. Independent voices were banned. Our struggle was hidden from the world and the suffering of our people was denied by large parts of the international community.

That is why, during our peace building and State building process, we placed so much importance on media freedom. It is a central pillar of our democracy.

But our struggle for democracy did not end with the restoration of our independence.

It does not end with elections. It continues every day - in our laws, in our media, in our classrooms and in our discussions.

Democracy cannot grow in darkness. And a strong and independent media is needed to promote dialogue, expose corruption, support an open political culture and give a voice to the vulnerable.

Never again will the voices of the Timorese be silenced.

We are all committed to making Timor-Leste a country that speaks the truth.

Today, we have an open society with a free press because of the decisions that we have made about the type of society that we want to live in.

It is also because of the Timorese journalists who do their work with honesty and dedication, and of governments that know they must respect the space for free expression.

But progress is never guaranteed.

This is why the role of our Press Council is so important. It ensures that the media operates freely — but also responsibly.

The role of the media is even more important today as we face new and emerging challenges.

The world is changing, and it is changing fast.

We can no longer rely on the certainties of the past.

We now live in a world of disorder, in which respect for international law is collapsing and international institutions are losing their authority and effectiveness.

Global tensions are rising and long-standing geopolitical understandings are being questioned.

This is all happening at the same time that we are seeing great advances in technology — advances that will shape our future: how we live, how we work and how we interact with each other.

One of the great technological advances of our time is Artificial Intelligence – or AI.

AI will impact the future of developing countries like Timor-Leste in ways we are only beginning to understand.

It can be a force for good. It can help deliver services in remote areas — including health care and education. It will give students tools for learning in their own local languages and help doctors diagnose illnesses faster.

In Timor-Leste, we speak many languages. AI will help translate our languages quickly and easily. This will make education, and the media, more accessible — especially in rural areas.

With the new subsea internet cable to Timor-Leste, there will also be the opportunity for our people to participate in the global digital economy. It will allow Timorese to communicate with the outside world and to share our history, our culture and our development progress.

However, as the world faces transformation from AI, we must speak openly about what this means for the future of our media and our democracy.

Just as AI can be a force for good, it comes with great risks.

AI can be used to spread misinformation. We have already seen the destructive power of rumours on social media in our country.

This problem could multiply if AI is used to not only spread misinformation - but to actually create it. That is, there is a real risk that AI will create content and stories that may appear to be credible but are actually false.

AI may push misinformation, conspiracy theories or divisive content on our people. This includes by generating false images and ‘deepfake’ videos as well as running automated disinformation campaigns.

We also know that AI systems can ‘hallucinate’. That is, they can invent information and present it as fact.

This will make us question the truth of everything we read and everything we see on the internet.

Journalism is about truth and democracy depends on facts. When facts become uncertain, democracy is weakened.

If we do not know what is real, we cannot make good decisions—for ourselves, or for our country.

AI will also have a great impact on the media business in Timor-Leste and around the world.

AI can already be used to write news stories. This puts the jobs of journalists at risk and will undermine the financial sustainability of our media agencies and organisations.

Power over information may shift from our people to a small number of foreign companies that control the internet today.

This will further weaken our democracy, our social cohesion and even our sovereignty.

That is why it is important that we regulate how AI is developed and used in our country so that we can protect the democracy and the freedom that we fought so hard to for.

The use of AI is already a reality and it will change our societies – but we must guide and control this change. We must act to protect freedom of expression and our open society.

We must ensure that technology serves the public interest and respects human dignity. And we must guarantee that AI always operates under human oversight.

This includes supporting public interest journalism that is grounded in ethics, facts and responsibility.

AI should support journalism - not replace it. It must not be trusted to tell our stories and it must not become a tool of political manipulation.

No machine can replace the human experience, judgment or courage that real journalism demands.

And to support and protect democracy, we need to improve digital literacy in Timor-Leste and explain the dangers of AI.

For Timorese, digital democracy is not just about being online and using the internet. It is about making sure that all Timorese have the information, the access and the confidence to participate in public life.

We must all work together to build a digital democracy that reflects the principles of our struggle: justice, equality and human dignity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you once again to the Press Council for organising this important Forum.

The Dili Dialogue Forum reminds us that an open and democratic society is not just about elections. It is about voice, and about access and about trust.

It is about the daily work of building a society in which people are free to think, to speak and to participate.

We have come a long way since our independence – we have built the most democratic society in Southeast Asia and we protect media freedom.

But we must continue to defend that freedom.

We must prepare for the digital future.

And we must ensure that new technologies are guided by ethics, accountability and public purpose.

We must be committed to the belief that technology must serve humanity, not the other way around.

Let us use this Forum to listen, to learn and to strengthen the foundations of our democracy. Let us work together to build a society that is not only free and open — but prepared for the future.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão