



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

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE REGIONAL
SEMINAR ON DECOLONISATION**

**“PATHWAYS TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE – ADVANCING
SOCIOECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NON-
SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES”**

**Palm Springs Hotel, Dili, Timor-Leste
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Palácio do Governo
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

Your Excellencies
Madame Chair of the Special Committee, Menissa Rambally
Distinguished Members and Delegates of the Special
Committee
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great satisfaction that I extend my greetings to all the distinguished participants of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation (C24), who have been gathered in Dili over the past three days.

For the government and people of Timor-Leste, it has been a privilege to host this Pacific Regional seminar in Dili, in collaboration with the United Nations Special Committee.

I congratulate all those involved in the organisation of the Seminar, and I wish to express my appreciation to the Government of Indonesia for facilitating the transit of conference delegates via Bali on their way to Dili.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This has been a truly meaningful week for Timor-Leste!

In addition to this seminar, on Monday we hosted the first Asia-Pacific Solidarity Conference for Western Sahara, also held in Dili.

The voice of the Sahrawi people — silenced for half a century on the international stage — deserves our attention and our collective and strategic action.

Regrettably, as has been noted throughout this week, the process of decolonisation and the exercise of self-determination remain incomplete — not only for Western Sahara, but for many other non-self-governing territories as well.

It has also been a special week for us because, on 20 May, Timor-Leste celebrated the 23rd anniversary of the Restoration of its Independence.

As you will have come to understand during your time here, the experience of Timor-Leste is a story of suffering — but also of hope and reconciliation.

After 24 years of resistance and persistent diplomacy at the United Nations in defence of our right to self-determination, Timor-Leste finally achieved its goal: **the right to choose — to choose to live in peace and in freedom.**

And we speak of “restoration” because we had declared our independence on 28 November 1975, only to be illegally occupied seven days later by our neighbouring country, Indonesia.

Let me take this opportunity to clarify, for the sake of history, that we were not victims of Indonesian people. In fact, many Indonesian individuals and groups supported us — they shared in our suffering and even in our struggle.

If we were victims, it was of a regime — and of an international order shaped by the Cold War, where all feared the spread of socialist governments, from the closest to the furthest of countries.

Above all, Timor-Leste was a victim of greed — of the commercial interests of other powers that placed material resources above the value of human dignity.

The truth is that our armed resistance did not face only the troops of the occupying country, but the military support of powerful Western nations. Between 1975 and 1979, we faced continuous loss — we were losing the war, and we were losing hope.

It was only in the 1980s, through a clear strategy and the mobilisation of the entire population, that we were able to reorganise the resistance guerrilla. At the time, offers of surrender were tempting for some fighters — me included.

The foremost lesson from our experience is, above all, that success depends on organisation, strategic vision, and, most importantly, the wholehearted engagement of the people in a cause that belongs to the nation.

Our ambition was never anything other than to end the war and find a peaceful solution that could offer better living conditions to our people — a people who had already suffered too much.

The enemy could not destroy us, but we — the resistance — could never have had the capacity to expel the occupying force. The only answer to this deadlock could be found in the will of the people — the decision either to continue suffering, or to surrender completely.

In truth, looking back, it all came down to the will, the strength, and the courage of the Timorese people!

That is why, in the 1980s, we decided to ask the Timorese people a direct question: did they want to continue suffering, or did they prefer integration? Because if the latter had been the will of the people, we — the resistance, in our armed, clandestine and diplomatic fronts — would have surrendered.

This intention was communicated to the United Nations, to Indonesia, and to Portugal. We waited 16 years to be seen and heard in our pursuit of a peaceful solution. And this — I must say — only strengthened the resilience, courage and spirit of sacrifice of the Timorese people.

I must recall here that when the United Nations created MINURSO in 1991 to organise a referendum in Western Sahara, this gave us renewed hope. We believed that after the Sahrawi people, it would be Palestine's turn, and then Timor-Leste's.

But in 1992, the referendum in Western Sahara was postponed — and it remains postponed to this day!

Timor-Leste learned a great deal from that experience. That is why in 1999, when we were also offered a delay — to avoid possible violence — we refused. We insisted that our own referendum go ahead, citing Western Sahara as the example of what could not be repeated.

Even in the face of threats, intimidation and violence, our people stood firm and courageous.

This is why I have a personal bond with Western Sahara. Their suffering became our lesson.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

International law is the solution — but it must be activated through collective effort, persistence, strategy and diplomacy.

And that is why we now conclude that the triumph of the Timorese was also a triumph of the international system.

Then, as now, I continue to believe that only international law can give voice to fragile and oppressed nations. It is the most powerful tool we have for the peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts, and the most promising means of ensuring the rights and dignity of all peoples — whether self-governing or not.

We, the people of Timor-Leste, know all too well the pain of having our inalienable rights — and our right to peace — denied by others.

That is why we uphold international law as the most powerful weapon of vulnerable nations. Dialogue and peaceful negotiation in pursuit of self-determination are the path toward a sustainable future.

In conclusion, Timor-Leste believes that just as we were able to attain our independence through the application of international law, all Non-Self-Governing Territories must have the same right.

I am aware that, at the opening of this conference, you heard from the President of the Republic, Dr. José Ramos-Horta, who in 1975, as part of the diplomatic front of our national liberation movement, first engaged with the Special Committee on Decolonisation.

The Armed Front and the Clandestine Front — isolated in their guerrilla resistance — would never have been enough to carry our cause forward, or to project the voice of the Timorese people.

We must wage a strategic struggle for peace — especially in today's troubled world — through an international community that has the diplomatic means and peaceful tools to support the recognition of the rights of peoples and nations.

We must uphold multilateralism and forums such as the C24, so that solidarity and international cooperation may prevail.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must eradicate the legacy of colonialism, and all economic interests that deny peoples their legitimate right to self-determination.

I am confident that this seminar in Dili has helped us to identify new ways and strategies to defend the dignity, sovereignty and potential of all peoples who remain in the process of decolonisation.

May the voice of every Non-Self-Governing Territory become our own voice.

May the strength and boldness of our ideas be channelled into concrete action — to raise awareness of the rights still to be fulfilled for the last colonies of our century, in each of our societies.

I hope the conclusions and recommendations of this Special Committee on Decolonisation, gathered here in Dili, will serve to strengthen not only the cultural identity of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, but also concrete actions to secure the socioeconomic sustainability of their populations.

Until sovereignty is guaranteed as a right under international law, no people shall ever be voiceless.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão