



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE
GEOSCIENCE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2026**

Dili, 5 February 2026



Palácio do Governo,
Avenida Presidente Nicolau Lobato,
Dili, Timor-Leste

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to speak at the opening of this International Geoscience Conference and to see so many people engaged in discussing Timor-Leste's geological knowledge and resources and the long-term future of our country.

While Timor-Leste is a young nation, we are a country with a long history. The Timorese people have always lived with a close relationship to their land and their seas.

The land and the sea are part of how our communities understand their place in the world, their responsibilities to one another and their connection to those who came before them.

The presence of our ancestors is woven into this understanding, and shapes our values of respect, obligation and continuity across generations.

It is this deep connection with the land and the sea that has sustained our people over centuries, through conflict, exploitation and the years of the Resistance.

For twenty-four years we fought a difficult struggle for self-determination and for sovereignty over our lands and seas.

It is now twenty-four years since the Restoration of our Independence.
We have established a peaceful and democratic State with an open society governed by the rule of law.

We are guided by our long-term Strategic Development Plan, from 2011 to 2030, which provides the framework to build a prosperous, well-educated and healthy nation.

It identifies three strategic industries on which to build our future: tourism, agriculture and petroleum and natural resources.

This future must include securing sovereignty over our seas as well as our land.

This is why we initiated a process of compulsory conciliation, under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, to secure our maritime boundaries with Australia.

And it is why we are now negotiating with our other maritime neighbour, Indonesia, to complete our maritime boundaries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now that we have reached twenty-four years since the Restoration of Independence, our ancestral connection with the land must be complemented with scientific knowledge.

Our nation's sovereignty is not just inherited from history; it is sustained through knowledge, judgement and responsibility.

That knowledge will allow us to better understand our territory, our resources and our opportunities.

For too many years decisions about our territory were made by others. Our independence has allowed us to determine our own future.

But meaningful sovereignty requires knowledge and an understanding of our resources, so that decisions can be made in the best interests of our nation.

That is what we have done with Greater Sunrise.

The development of Greater Sunrise will generate national benefits, including jobs, long-term revenue and the establishment of an industrial base along our south coast.

For this reason, the Government's position has always been clear: the natural gas from Greater Sunrise must be processed onshore in Timor-Leste.

This is essential for national development.

Just as we have been able to make an evidence-based decision for Greater Sunrise – drawing on the best scientific, engineering and economic knowledge – we must develop the same understanding of the geology and natural resources of the rest of our territory.

That is why the Institute of Geosciences of Timor-Leste is so important to our country.

It is responsible for promoting and undertaking geological research and for developing scientific knowledge in the service of the State and the Timorese people.

Without this knowledge, there can be no true sovereignty over our natural resources.

We also know that in our interconnected world we cannot act alone. International cooperation is a strategic necessity for our country.

Collaboration with national geological services, universities and international research centres allows us to accelerate learning, share experiences, adopt good practices and avoid mistakes already made in other contexts.

This International Geoscience Conference is a concrete example of this cooperation.

It brings together institutions from the Lusophone world, the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, in an open dialogue on the role of geoscience in State-building, economic growth and sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Science must serve people. Knowledge must be translated into decisions that improve lives, protect communities and create jobs.

The Government is committed to continuing to invest in science.

We want young Timorese trained in geosciences, engineering, the environment and energy. We also want professional public institutions capable of planning, regulating and deciding on the basis of knowledge.

This is how our natural resources can become a foundation for our shared prosperity and a more secure future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste is committed to a path of inclusive and sustainable development informed by knowledge, strengthened through cooperation and focused on long-term national priorities.

This Conference provides an important opportunity for reflection, for the exchange of knowledge and for the building of partnerships that endure beyond this gathering.

The choices we make about our land and our seas will shape the country we become.

I trust that this Conference will help inform those choices and contribute to the future of our nation over the next twenty-four years and beyond.

Thank you very much.