



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

**OPENING REMARKS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT THE FIRST ASEAN CHAIRSHIP NATIONAL ORGANISING COUNCIL 2029
MEETING**

Dili, 23 February 2026



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

Members of Government,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we begin the formal preparations for Timor-Leste's Chairship of ASEAN in 2029.

Within one generation of restoring our independence, our nation will assume responsibility for leading the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

This will be a defining moment in our history and a measure of the strength we have built as a State.

In 2011 the Timorese people came together to build a foundation for a lasting peace. We agreed to say 'goodbye to conflict' and to 'welcome development'.

With this understanding we were able to look to the future and develop a national vision for our country.

We came together again to develop a long-term plan to be able to achieve our vision, the Strategic Development Plan, to be implemented from 2011 to 2030.

That same year, we applied for membership of ASEAN.

Accession to ASEAN was a long process and we can thank the efforts of many people in this room for their commitment and hard work.

At the ASEAN Summit in Malaysia last year, we were admitted to ASEAN. It was a great achievement for our country.

It reflected the trust and confidence that our region has in our capacity to contribute to regional peace, security and prosperity.

ASEAN membership embeds Timor-Leste fully within the economic and strategic life of Southeast Asia, linking our development to the stability and growth of our region.

It reshapes our economic future by giving our people greater access to regional markets, education and work.

ASEAN membership also strengthens our strategic and political voice by allowing Timor-Leste to help shape regional decision making and political action.

As a nation, we have moved from peace building and State building to a period of consolidation and integration.

When Timor-Leste assumes the ASEAN Chair in 2029, we must move to a new period of leadership.

Our country will no longer stand at the margins of regional affairs but will assume full responsibility within them.

This is a great responsibility for our nation and for all our people.

We must make sure that we live up to the trust that our regional partners have placed in us.

The ASEAN Charter grants us the same rights and obligations as every Member State. This means that in 2029 we will be expected not only to participate, but to guide.

Chairing ASEAN is not simply about hosting meetings. It is a test of whether the State can coordinate, prioritise, budget and execute with discipline.

It will require effective whole-of-government cooperation, careful planning, sound financial management, secure and reliable infrastructure and a strong national voice in an increasingly complex regional environment.

Our Chairship will need to demonstrate that we have built the institutional strength not only to sit at the table, but to lead it.

In 2029, our performance will shape how our region understands Timor-Leste for the next generation.

In 2029 the eyes of the world will be on us. It will be, by far, the largest international event that we have ever held.

At the ASEAN Summit we will host not only regional leaders, but leaders from across the world. We must be ready.

That is why preparation must begin now.

The governance structure established by the Council of Ministers provides the framework for this work. This Council will set the strategic direction.

The Executive Committee will oversee implementation and the National ASEAN Secretariat will coordinate the work.

Today we take our first concrete actions. We will adopt Terms of Reference for the relevant sectors and operational subcommittees. And we will approve the 2026 Annual Workplan.

This first year is our foundation phase. By the end of 2026, we must have completed our baseline assessments and our action plans.

This will require a unity of purpose across government.

Importantly, the preparations for 2029 will require us to strengthen critical infrastructure across our country.

They will require improvements in our health, education and public service systems so that we can meet both international standards and the needs of our own people.

They will deepen our regional integration and strengthen the foundations of our long-term growth and opportunity.

And so, the work we undertake to host ASEAN is more than about hosting the 2029 Summit. It is about working to improve the lives and opportunities of all our people.

The following year, in 2030, our twenty-year Strategic Development Plan will have come to an end.

The foundational work we undertake to host ASEAN will further consolidate our State and prepare us to plan for the next twenty years.

This is the task before us. It is not just about preparing for a Summit, it is a process of nation building to support a positive future for our people.

With that, I declare the first meeting of the ASEAN Chairship National Organising Council open and I invite the National ASEAN Secretariat to introduce the next agenda item.

Thank you very much.