



PRIME
MINISTER

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
TIMOR-LESTE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS
MEETING (TLDPM)**

**“Charting a Resilient Horizon: Blue Economy, ASEAN Integration and
Coordinated Action”**

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão Auditorium, Ministry of Finance, Dili
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Palácio do Governo
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

Members of the Government,

Ambassadors, Representatives of International Organisations and other Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Development Partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and the people of Timor-Leste, I welcome you to this annual meeting with our Development Partners.

Since the first Donors' Conference in Tokyo in 1999, these meetings have been decisive for reconstruction, stability and the well-being of our people.

The resilience of Timor-Leste — overcoming the many adversities throughout our history, the humility to learn from mistakes and perseverance in the face of internal and external pressures — is not only the result of the determination of our people. It is also the result of the friendship, solidarity and support we have received from our partners, from the struggle for independence to the building and consolidation of the State and the Nation.

Thanks to this shared journey, we can now recognise significant progress in democracy, development and peace.

It is in this spirit of solidarity and shared determination, but also of a strong desire to do better for the country, that this year we celebrated the 24th Anniversary of the Restoration of Independence.

This was a celebration with a very particular symbolism. We celebrated 24 years of independence, a period equivalent to the duration of the struggle for independence.

It was therefore with joy, but also with great responsibility, that we celebrated 20 May this year. This historic date is proof that a nation, even a small one, can achieve great victories when it fights with courage, awareness, national unity and love for the Homeland.

And this struggle for sovereignty and nation-building has not ended. We know that deep vulnerabilities persist, requiring more ambitious, coordinated and results-oriented responses.

The theme of this meeting — *Charting a Resilient Horizon: Blue Economy, ASEAN Integration and Coordinated Action* — reflects that ambition.

This year, we wish to share with you and, above all, discuss with you three central pillars of this resilient future:

1. The *Policy and Action Plan for the Promotion of a Resilient and Sustainable Economy of the Sea in Timor-Leste 2025–2035* (Blue Economy Policy);
2. The *Monitoring Report on the Progress of the Strategic Development Plan 2011–2030* (SDP);
3. ASEAN Membership: regional integration at the service of national development.

These three pillars are the result of intense work carried out over recent months. Above all, they represent three structural achievements aimed at addressing both old and new vulnerabilities: poverty, inequality, unemployment, food insecurity, the impacts of climate change, global economic uncertainty and growing geopolitical instability.

These vulnerabilities cannot be overcome by Timor-Leste alone. The experience of the past, and the reality of the present, show us that we continue to need our development partners.

But these partnerships will only realise their full potential if they are based on clear alignment between national priorities, financing, implementation strategies and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me therefore to address each of these pillars.

I. The Blue Economy Policy

On 20 February of this year, the Council of Ministers approved the *Policy and Action Plan for the Promotion of a Resilient and Sustainable Economy of the Sea*. That is, it approved the roadmap for the implementation of the Blue Economy in the country.

Through this policy, the Ninth Constitutional Government assumes a clear strategic vision: **to transform our sea — which is central to our identity, economy and**

geopolitics — into a source of sustainable development, social inclusion and environmental resilience.

This Policy, which the Land and Maritime Boundary Office will present in greater detail shortly, is interconnected with the Strategic Development Plan and with our integration into the ASEAN regional space.

In summary, the Government, through a holistic and cross-cutting approach, intends to:

- invest in **enhancing traditional and emerging ocean-related economic sectors**, promoting value chains that create decent jobs, especially for young people, women and vulnerable groups in coastal areas;
- invest in the **capacity-building of national human resources** and in **essential equipment and infrastructure** for the development of the Blue Economy, including maritime security, surveillance and the sustainable management of our national maritime space;
- invest in **building of a “blue generation” and in promoting ocean literacy** — education focused on the ocean, from primary to higher education, as well as civic education that contributes to behavioural change aimed at preventing environmental destruction, combating marine pollution, and protecting marine and coastal ecosystems;
- preserve the **ocean as a universal good** through the sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystem services. This also includes more active participation in regional and international forums, particularly in defence of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), those with the most to lose, and to lose most rapidly, from the destruction of this heritage of humanity;
- promote **marine scientific research**, linked to the knowledge and traditional practices of local communities, thereby contributing to greater understanding and the global protection of the ocean.

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are all proud of our sea. It is not merely beautiful — it is sublime! We have unique and precious marine species that make Timor-Leste a truly special place, a treasure of our planet.

We are at the heart of the Coral Triangle, one of the regions with the richest biodiversity in the world. This position is not merely a geographical privilege; it also places upon us a duty: the duty to protect, to care for and to act.

As such, we can and must become a living laboratory of the ocean in Southeast Asia.

This region faces serious threats that are already causing biodiversity loss today: climate change, which is warming our waters and raising sea levels; pollution, which is suffocating marine life; and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which removes from the sea more than it can replenish.

These damages are often irreversible. And no nation can face them alone. Therefore, protecting the ocean requires courage, responsibility and regional and international cooperation.

By acting together to ensure a diverse and generous ocean, we are acting to protect future generations.

Timor-Leste therefore intends to establish a system of international scientific and technological partnerships and carry out its first **Marine Biodiversity Survey and Study**, with the involvement and capacity-building of young people and local communities. This initiative will be linked to other strategic objectives for marine preservation and conservation, such as:

- the establishment of **Marine Research and Education Centres**;
- the network of **Marine Protected Areas** and their respective management plans, including the establishment of the **Ataúro National Park**; and
- the **National Ocean Literacy Program**.

And if any doubts remain regarding our commitment to the Blue Economy, we already have concrete work undertaken that demonstrates it.

While the Government was preparing its Policy and respective Action Plan, it also moved forward with the approval of:

- the Legal Framework for **International Marine Scientific Research**, applicable to activities carried out within the national maritime space when undertaken at the request of foreign States or international organisations;
- the Legal Framework for the **Planning and Management of the National Maritime Space**, ensuring its proper organisation and use through an integrated approach to the maritime territory, rather than a merely sectoral one, while also taking into account land-sea interaction;
- the **Marine Satellite Account**, a statistical instrument that makes it possible to measure economic activities related to the sea; and
- the designation of 5 June as the **National Sea Day**, further strengthening the *Ha'u-Nia Tasi, Ha'u-Nia Timor* campaign, which has promoted awareness of the importance of ocean health.

I have always defended the principle that the full sovereignty of a nation also depends on its ability to fully assert its borders, its development, its identity and its dignity.

Our struggle for the delimitation of maritime boundaries is not merely a political matter, but rather an issue of national sovereignty: the right of the Timorese people to benefit from the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits integrated within our national maritime space.

For Timor-Leste, the Blue Economy is not only a strategy for survival, but also one for development and climate resilience.

I am convinced that, through coordination and renewed ambition in development partnerships, we will be capable of fulfilling this demanding agenda.

And I must make this clear: this agenda does not depend solely on interaction between the Government and development partners. Above all, it depends on the partnerships we are able to build with the private sector, non-governmental organisations and local communities.

The combination of efforts and the sharing of technical and scientific knowledge — not only in traditional sectors, but also in innovative areas ranging from marine biotechnology to renewable energy, including new financing instruments and emerging mechanisms such as carbon credits and blue bonds — could make Timor-Leste a new international example in the field of the Blue Economy.

No ambition is too great when the determination of a people and cooperation, both national and international, walk side by side.

II. Monitoring Report on the Progress of the Strategic Development Plan 2011–2030 (SDP)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The SDP was conceived as a commitment of the State, beyond political cycles. Since 2011, this structural framework has guided our public policies and institutional reforms, our strategic investments and coordinated action between the Government, development partners, the private sector and civil society.

I had the responsibility of leading its initial formulation and several phases of its implementation. For this reason, I regard the SDP not as the plan of a Government, but as a collective legacy of the Nation.

Its continuity across different administrations is a sign of institutional maturity and of the awareness that **development requires vision, coherence and persistence**.

Throughout this decade and a half since the approval of the SDP, we have faced global economic shocks, extreme climate events, social and demographic pressures and transformations in the regional and international context. During these periods of uncertainty, the SDP provided stability — allowing us to adjust our course without ever losing direction.

Today, the Minister of Planning and Strategic Investment will present the Monitoring Report on the Progress of the SDP. This report represents an exercise in transparency, political accountability and institutional learning — principles by which this Government is guided.

We will see that, despite important progress, most of the targets set out in the SDP have still not been achieved. We must therefore focus, until 2030, on accelerating its implementation and transforming progress into measurable results in people's lives.

This report raises a question that we cannot ignore: if we all say that we are implementing the SDP — Government and partners alike — why do so many targets remain incomplete or even unachieved?

That is what I ask of you today: a **joint reflection on our shared responsibility to correct the course of implementation.**

The Government hereby commits itself to conducting this final phase of implementation with greater discipline, responsibility and focus on results.

This will be done through the **Medium-Term Planning Framework 2027–2030**, our roadmap to:

- achieve upper-middle-income country status;
- diversify the non-oil economy (also through the Blue Economy);
- promote more inclusive growth;
- strengthen human capital;
- consolidate institutional resilience; and
- transition from a model based on public expenditure to one driven by productivity and private investment.

Concretely, I ask you to use the data from the SDP Monitoring Report to assess the targets that remain incomplete, or even unachieved, and from this point onwards, to refine cooperation strategies so that together we may achieve concrete results.

Recognising the gaps and constraints identified in the report will be fundamental to achieving the quantified targets for 2030.

The five priority areas identified by the Government and the 10 flagship interventions around which we intend to concentrate efforts and partnerships (to be explained by the Minister) constitute our new roadmap.

I believe that a Government is only truly strong when it governs supported by a broad basis of cooperation.

It is in the strategic alliance with development partners and civil society that the Government finds its greatest legitimacy, collective knowledge and expertise, and the real capacity to transform the country.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

III. ASEAN Membership: Regional Integration in the Service of National Development

Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN, formalised at the 47th Summit in Kuala Lumpur last October, represents another historic milestone in our 24-year journey as an independent State.

This achievement was the result of a long process of internal preparation, frank dialogue with our neighbours and partners, and a firm commitment to the values, rules and mechanisms that structure the Southeast Asian regional community.

Since 2002, ASEAN membership has been a strategic aspiration shared by different generations of national leaders and rooted in the will of our people to promote peace and stability, including with our closest neighbours.

For the Timorese people, belonging to ASEAN represents more than integration into a geopolitical and socio-economic space. It represents being part of a "human family" with which we identify and alongside which we wish to grow and prosper.

ASEAN is not only a privileged platform for deepening our economic integration, diversifying trade and investment, modernising infrastructure, fostering skills, and creating jobs for young people.

It is also an opportunity to defend our identity, our culture, and our environment, particularly the marine environment.

And, at a time of heightened geopolitical tension, it is an opportunity to join efforts in addressing major global challenges — from regional security to food, energy, technological and climate security.

Rising fuel prices aggravate food insecurity, particularly in importing countries such as Timor-Leste, which is responding through programs to support agricultural production,

while calling on ASEAN to strengthen resilient, sustainable and accessible food systems for all.

At the same time, Timor-Leste is committed to developing its energy and petroleum sector in order to contribute to ASEAN's collective energy security. Our shared objective is to build a more secure, diversified and sustainable energy system for our region.

The safety of people, one of ASEAN's central pillars, is crucial for Timor-Leste's development. But our country is also one of the "joints" supporting this pillar. Only through close cooperation among the countries of the region will it be possible to protect ASEAN citizens from external crises and to combat, through coordinated responses, transnational crime, human trafficking, and cybercrime — threats that undermine regional stability, weaken the rule of law, and compromise sustainable development.

And we cannot speak about the security of ASEAN citizens without speaking about climate change. Our region is especially vulnerable to floods, droughts, tropical storms, rising sea levels, and environmental degradation.

These phenomena threaten lives, livelihoods, and food sources. They force internal and cross-border displacement and increase the risk of social tensions and conflict. I believe that investing in adaptation and resilience, in safe infrastructure, in early warning systems, and in sustainable development models — such as the Blue Economy — is also an investment in people's security.

Through ASEAN mechanisms, we are all better protected. Through political commitments and permanent mechanisms for information-sharing, prevention, and joint response, we are better prepared to face adversity and ensure a resilient future.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Being part of ASEAN is, in itself, a constant exercise in commitment, responsibility and coordinated action.

Timor-Leste's experience in international law, reconciliation, and national and international dialogue, as well as cooperation with bilateral and multilateral partners, constitutes a unique added value, demonstrated through the building of democratic institutions, a dynamic civil society, and a culture of public debate that concretely reflect the freedom won through great sacrifice.

It is precisely this accumulated experience, combined with the vitality of our youth and our commitment to consolidating strong, open, and inclusive institutions, that we wish to place at the service of our regional community within ASEAN.

And to achieve this, we know that we can continue to count on our development partners, because this victory for Timor-Leste is also another victory for international cooperation.

Timor-Leste is not alone in the “ASEAN Charter”. The support of our partners in our accession to ASEAN is not merely a footnote.

We continue to require this support to meet new responsibilities, greater institutional discipline, stronger policy coherence, greater implementation capacity, and more prepared and professional diplomacy.

We continue to require this support for the training of our human resources and the capacity-building of our young people, the future leaders of the country and the region.

It is also in the knowledge that we can count on the solidarity and unconditional support of our partners that Timor-Leste intends to assume the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2029.

Let us make history together once again!

Let us prove to the world, once more, that resilience overcomes national fragilities. And that our coordinated action overcomes any obstacle.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão