



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

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT THE CEREMONY FOR THE CONFERRAL OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
HONORIS CAUSA AT UNIVERSITAS HASANUDDIN
“SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONAL RESILIENCE IN A CONTESTED WORLD”

Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar

5 September 2026



Palácio do Governo
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

The Magnificent Rector, Prof. Dr. Ir. Jamaluddin Jompa, M.Sc
Prof. Suharman Hamzah, Ph.D, Vice Rector for Partnerships, Internationalisation
Prof. Dr. Hafid Abbas
Prof. Dr. Phil Sukri, S.IP., M.Si
Dr. (HC) Lutfi Rauf, MA.
Distinguished academics and guests,
Students,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to receive this honorary doctorate from Universitas Hasanuddin.

I am also honoured to follow the many distinguished leaders and public figures who have received the honour before me.

This recognition has even greater meaning because it comes from a university that has been part of Indonesia's nation-building since the early years of the Republic.

Universitas Hasanuddin was established in 1956, just over a decade after Indonesia proclaimed its independence.

Its establishment was part of the great national effort to build the institutions and capacity of the new Republic.

Independence had been won, but the work of building the country had only begun. Indonesia needed doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists, and even lawyers.

But universities had a larger role than educating professionals. They were places where Indonesians could develop their own knowledge, debate ideas and provide the imagination the new nation needed to shape its future.

For Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic State, knowledge of the sea was especially important.

For many decades, the sea has been a special focus of teaching and research at Universitas Hasanuddin, including through your Faculty of Marine Science and Fisheries.

The sea your marine scientists study, is also our sea.

Timor-Leste and Indonesia share the island of Timor. We also share the seas around us.

For the Timorese people, the sea is part of who we are.

It has shaped our culture and our history. It gives food and livelihoods to our communities. And it holds resources that will secure the long-term future of our nation.

Our creation story itself places the ocean at the heart of the relationship between the Timorese people and our land.

The sea is also inseparable from our sovereignty. For Timor-Leste, establishing permanent maritime boundaries has been a critical part of completing the work of independence.

And because we share these seas with Indonesia, their peaceful delimitation and management are an important part of the relationship between our two countries.

This question of sovereignty is also part of the identity of this university.

Universitas Hasanuddin carries the name of Sultan Hasanuddin, a national hero of Indonesia remembered for his resistance to foreign domination.

His life belongs to a wider history of this region, a history of people who defended their independence and resisted the belief that others had the right to determine their future.

His struggle took place in another century and in another world. But the fundamental question he confronted has run through the modern history of Southeast Asia.

Who has the right to decide the future of a people?

Indonesia confronted this question over centuries of colonial rule and through its struggle for independence.

The Timorese people faced the same question. For 24 years we resisted occupation and struggled for self-determination.

But we also understood that our struggle was part of a much larger history.

Across the colonised world, people fought to end colonial rule and win independence. Their struggles redrew the political map of the world.

New nations emerged and those who had been denied political freedom began to determine their own affairs.

Indonesia stood at the centre of one of the most significant moments in that movement. In Bandung in 1955, Sukarno, Nehru, Zhou Enlai and Nasser joined leaders from across Asia and Africa whose countries had endured war and foreign domination.

There was a sense that a new world was possible.

The Bandung Conference helped establish principles of sovereign equality, respect between nations and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

It helped inspire the Non-Aligned Movement and a tradition of cooperation between developing countries that continues to resonate today.

President Sukarno also understood that the end of formal colonial rule did not mean that domination had disappeared.

At Bandung, he warned that colonialism could return in new forms, through economic power, political pressure and control exercised from outside.

His warning was already playing out in the Cold War. The language had changed, but powerful countries still believed they could dictate the choices of weaker nations.

Our region suffered greatly when the principles agreed at Bandung were cast aside during the Cold War.

Countries across Southeast Asia became caught in the strategic calculations of larger powers.

Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos were devastated by war. Indonesia too was influenced by anti-communist fears and the strategic interests of the larger powers.

Those same forces shaped what happened in Timor-Leste.

Our decolonisation from Portugal came at the height of the Cold War and our right to self-determination was sacrificed to regional security concerns and Western strategic interests.

Indonesia invaded our country in 1975 and for 24 years the Timorese people resisted occupation.

For many years I led the Resistance from the mountains of Timor. After my capture, I continued from Cipinang prison in Jakarta.

We understood that fighting alone could not liberate our country.

The purpose of the armed Resistance was to keep our struggle alive, to show the world that the Timorese people had not surrendered and to create the space for our diplomatic campaign.

This campaign was grounded in international law and in our right to self-determination. It was carried through the United Nations, through international diplomacy and through the solidarity of people around the world.

We knew in our hearts that the only path to peace was through dialogue.

And we knew that this path would demand political courage and a vision of our region as a place of peace, respect for human rights and shared prosperity.

In 1999, President B.J. Habibie showed that courage and agreed to allow the Timorese to vote on our future.

In the Popular Consultation that August, we exercised our right to self-determination and voted overwhelmingly for independence.

But after 24 years of conflict, we still had to build peace.

We knew our first acts of independence had to be reconciliation within our country and with Indonesia.

We could not build a nation on vengeance and hate. Instead, we needed to build a foundation of reconciliation and hope.

The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor documented the experiences of our people and supported reconciliation within our communities.

Later, Timor-Leste and Indonesia established the Commission of Truth and Friendship to examine the events of 1999 together.

We understood that reconciliation built on half-truths would not endure.

Over the years since then, Indonesia and Timor-Leste have built a relationship that would have seemed almost impossible during the years of conflict.

President Prabowo, who served as an Indonesian general in our country, has also spoken about this history of reconciliation.

He has said that while he and I were once foes, today we sit together as friends.

That is true.

Today, Indonesia and Timor-Leste are close friends and neighbours. We work together for the peace, stability and development of our region.

It was President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who encouraged Timor-Leste to seek membership of ASEAN, and today our two countries sit together as members of the same regional family.

People cross our shared border every day to see family and friends, receive medical treatment, trade and do business.

Education has become one of the strongest links between our countries.

Today, thousands of young Timorese are studying at universities across Indonesia.

Universitas Hasanuddin is part of this close relationship between our countries.

Timorese students already study here and this month another 57 Timorese joined the University's new postgraduate intake.

They are gaining knowledge and qualifications that Timor-Leste needs. They are also building professional relationships that will continue long after they return home.

This is what reconciliation means. Young Timorese now come to Indonesia to study, to make friends and to prepare for their future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Restoration of our Independence fulfilled our people's long-held dream of self-determination.

But our sovereignty did not stop at the shoreline.

When Timor-Leste became independent, we still did not have permanent maritime boundaries.

To our south, Australia refused to recognise our sovereign rights over our seas.

Australia was taking revenue from oil and gas fields in the Timor Sea while refusing to negotiate a maritime boundary.

We had fought for 24 years because we believed that decisions about our land, our resources and our future should be made by our own people.

While we were now independent, we were still fighting for that same principle at sea.

Australia was a much larger and more powerful country, but we knew that we had international law on our side.

So, in 2016, Timor-Leste initiated the first ever Compulsory Conciliation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

It was only through this process that we were able to bring Australia to the negotiating table and reach agreement on maritime boundaries.

Here, I want to acknowledge Indonesia's important role as one of the principal architects of the modern law of the sea and of UNCLOS.

So, when Timor-Leste turned to UNCLOS, we were relying on a legal order that Indonesia had helped build.

For Timor-Leste, however, the work of defining our maritime boundaries is not yet complete. We must still complete our maritime boundaries with Indonesia.

With Indonesia, we are taking a different approach. We are negotiating directly with each other through dialogue and in accordance with UNCLOS and international law.

We have made strong progress, and I trust that we can complete this work in the same spirit of friendship and mutual respect that has transformed the relationship between our peoples.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Securing our sovereign rights over our land and our seas is essential. But sovereignty must also be sustained by the country we build.

In the early years of independence, Timor-Leste had to secure peace and build the foundations of the State.

We built institutions and national infrastructure.

But independence alone cannot feed us.

We now have to build a strong and productive economy that can sustain our nation over the long term.

For Timor-Leste, this means creating jobs and opportunities, especially for our young people.

It also means improving our food security and making sure that we produce more of what we need.

And we need to use our natural resources for the benefit of our people.

Sovereignty is not a slogan. It requires both political and economic strength.

A country may have a flag, a Constitution and a seat at the United Nations.

But if it cannot provide opportunities for its young people, if it cannot provide for the basic needs of its population or if it is dependent on decisions made elsewhere, then its ability to determine its own future becomes limited.

We fought for our political independence. Now we must build the economic resilience that allows our independence to be sustained across generations.

Today, this task is becoming more difficult.

We are now living in a more dangerous world. There is more armed conflict today than at any time since the Second World War.

There are growing geopolitical tensions and an increase in intolerance and division.

At the same time, increasing inequality is fuelling instability and resentment.

We know this especially from the experience of fragile States.

Timor-Leste helped establish the g7+ group, which brings together 20 countries affected by conflict and fragility.

The g7+ gives fragile countries a voice and a forum to support each other in building peace and resilience.

Yet, at a time when we need international cooperation most, the rules of the international system are being weakened.

International law is being treated as optional rather than binding, especially by powerful countries.

If we live in a world where power determines which rules will be applied, small and fragile countries will always be vulnerable.

That is why cooperation is so important for small and developing States.

We need international law to protect our rights. We need multilateral institutions so that we can cooperate and work together on problems we can't solve alone.

A sovereign country does not prove its independence by standing apart. It proves it by choosing freely how it will work with others.

In this volatile and contested world, a small country like Timor-Leste cannot stand alone.

That is why we worked for so many years to join ASEAN.

Our accession to ASEAN fulfilled a long-held national aspiration. It also places Timor-Leste within the economic, political and strategic life of this region.

In 2029, Timor-Leste will have the great honour of chairing ASEAN.

This will be an important moment for our young country. It will also be a privilege and responsibility to serve the ASEAN community and help strengthen the peace, cooperation and unity of our region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sovereignty also depends on knowledge and national capacity.

A country cannot make good decisions about its future if it does not have the human resources and expertise to understand the options and possibilities available.

That is why universities matter.

They give us knowledge and expertise.

But they also help teach us to think critically, to test ideas and to exercise judgement.

Knowledge helps us understand the world. Judgement helps us decide what to do about it.

During the Resistance, we were often faced with the most difficult of choices under circumstances of great pressure. But we had to make strategic decisions to keep the path to self-determination alive.

Today, good judgement is becoming even more critical as technology changes the world that we live in.

Artificial intelligence is one example.

While AI can bring benefits, it also raises serious questions about sovereignty.

We must ask what happens when technology companies become richer and more powerful than countries.

Already we see AI companies packaging up the wealth of human knowledge and charging it back to us for the price of a monthly subscription.

There are also dangers for our societies and our democracies.

The same technology that makes knowledge cheaper can also make deception cheaper. AI can make scams and fraud more convincing. It can create realistic voices, images and videos of things that never happened.

The danger is not only that people will believe what is false. If anything can be fabricated, people may also begin to doubt what is true.

This makes education and critical thinking more important than ever.

We need people who ask where information came from, what the evidence is and whether what they are being told is true.

We need people who can make their own judgements rather than just accepting answers given by AI.

This is exactly the responsibility carried by both the Indonesian and Timorese students at Universitas Hasanuddin. The good judgement they develop here will help decide whether our countries control our own future, or whether we simply become consumers of decisions made elsewhere.

Universities have a responsibility that goes far beyond preparing people for employment.

Sovereignty also requires people with the knowledge to understand our choices and the judgement to make the right decisions for our people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For Timor-Leste, the work of building a sovereign and resilient nation is not finished.

Political independence gave our people the right to determine our future. But every generation must build the capacity to exercise that right.

A resilient nation needs strong institutions and a productive economy. It also needs people with the knowledge, skills and judgement to make good decisions in the national interest.

Universities are part of that national strength.

Universitas Hasanuddin was established when Indonesia was building the institutions and human capacity of a new Republic.

Seventy years later, the world is very different, but that work continues.

Universities must continue to develop knowledge, encourage critical thought and prepare people who can contribute to the strength and resilience of their nations.

The Timorese students studying here at Universitas Hasanuddin are already part of that work.

Their presence also says something important about our two countries.

Today, young Timorese come to Indonesia to study. Our governments work together, and our countries sit together in ASEAN.

This is what reconciliation has made possible.

The honour bestowed today reflects how far the relationship between our countries has come.

To the Rector, the Senate, the academics and students of Universitas Hasanuddin, thank you for this great honour and for the friendship you have shown to the people of Timor-Leste.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão