



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

**SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT THE TIMOR-LESTE WOMEN IN BUSINESS AWARDS 2026**

Dili, Timor-leste
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Palácio do Governo
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

His Excellency Dr. José Ramos-Horta, President of the Republic

Members of Government

Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Ms Hergui Luina Fernandes Alves, President of the Timor-Leste Business Women Association (AEMTL)

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to join you tonight for the third Timor-Leste Women in Business Awards.

I congratulate all the finalists being recognised this evening.

You have built businesses in different sectors and different parts of our country, and you have shown the confidence and determination needed to succeed.

I also thank AEMTL, the organisers and all those who have supported these Awards and the development of women in business in Timor-Leste.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During our struggle for independence, Timorese women played a critical role across all fronts of the Resistance.

Many fought with FALINTIL, while others were central to the Clandestine Front and to sustaining the Resistance throughout the country.

Women endured enormous hardship and sacrifice while also holding families and communities together through some of the most difficult years in our history.

That courage and sacrifice helped us win our independence.

Since the Restoration of Independence in 2002, we have worked to build peace and establish our State.

Today our challenge is to build a strong economy that can support our people and protect this independence.

Timorese women are again critical to this national effort.

Across our society and our economy, women continue to show great strength and resilience.

This energy and determination will be essential as we build our economy, create new opportunities for our people and secure the future of Timor-Leste.

We need a stronger private sector. And we need Timorese businesses that produce goods and services, create jobs and reduce our dependence on imports.

This is why our entrepreneurs are so important to the future of our country and why I believe the women we honour tonight are contributing to the work of nation-building.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Government has a responsibility to create the conditions in which business can succeed.

We are living through a volatile period in the international economy. Despite this difficult environment, the Timor-Leste economy has continued to grow.

Economic growth was 4.3 per cent in 2024 and increased to an estimated 4.6 per cent in 2025. Inflation is expected to remain low at around 2 per cent.

This economic stability is important because it provides a foundation of trust and confidence for investment and the establishment of new businesses.

The Government will continue working to maintain this stability, while investing in infrastructure and creating the conditions for private sector growth.

We are also creating new opportunities for Timorese businesses beyond our borders.

In 2024, Timor-Leste joined the World Trade Organization, opening new opportunities for trade, investment and private sector growth.

And last year, we became a member of ASEAN, connecting Timor-Leste to one of the world's most dynamic economic regions.

These are important achievements for our country, but their real value will come from the opportunities they create for our people and our businesses.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We also understand that ambition and hard work are not enough if women entrepreneurs cannot obtain the finance they need to grow.

Access to finance is one of the major constraints facing small businesses in developing countries and women-owned businesses are often particularly affected.

This is why the Government is establishing the National Development Bank.

The Bank will help Timorese entrepreneurs and small businesses gain better access to capital so they can invest, expand their operations and employ more people.

We want more Timorese businesses to grow and support the development of our economy.

The finalists we recognise tonight demonstrate the potential that already exists in Timor-Leste.

Their businesses show creativity, determination and confidence in the future of our country.

They are finding opportunities, serving their communities and building successful enterprises across our country.

Their success will also show another generation of Timorese women what they can achieve.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our history shows that the strength of Timorese women has always been part of the strength of Timor-Leste.

I congratulate all of tonight's finalists and I encourage you to continue to build your businesses, pursue your ideas and have confidence in what you can achieve.

Timor-Leste needs your creativity, your passion and your vision for the future of our country.

Strong women, strong nation.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão