



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

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL CEREMONY MARKING EDUCATION
MONTH AND WORLD TEACHERS' DAY**

**“Valuing, Protecting and Strengthening the Status of the Teaching Profession in
a Rapidly Changing World”**

**“Teachers as Agents of Transformation: Their Role, Skills and Responsibilities in
Building the Timorese State”**

Dili, Timor-Leste
27 October 2026

Your Excellencies, the Members of Government,
Your Excellency, the Minister of Education
Distinguished representatives of educational and teacher training
institutions,
Dear Development Partners,

Dear teachers from across the country,
Dear students and young people gathered here today,

It is with a profound sense of responsibility, but also with great hope for the future, that I join you at this National Ceremony marking Education Month and World Teachers' Day 2026.

This ceremony is a special occasion, as it offers us an opportunity to reflect on what lies at the heart of Timor-Leste's future. And that heart is education.

And at the very heart of education lies the force that keeps it beating: our teachers!

The overarching theme that brings us together – “Valuing, Protecting and Strengthening the Status of the Teaching Profession in a Rapidly Changing World” – must be seen as a call to action, a commitment that we must all embrace.

At the same time, the reflection we are invited to undertake points directly to a truth confirmed by Timor-Leste's own history: those who teach are the silent builders of our nation.

Teachers are agents of transformation, present day after day in the lives of our children and young people. They therefore play an irreplaceable role in shaping new generations and building our country.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education is a strategic priority for any Government, in any country. In Timor-Leste, given our difficult history, it is also a constant challenge.

During decades of occupation, our people were denied the full use of the languages that are now official, our institutions were destroyed, many schools disappeared, and an entire generation grew up marked by trauma, a lack of opportunities and difficulties in exercising their right to learn.

The education sector, like almost everything else in our country, had to be rebuilt: the education system, infrastructure, curricula and teaching materials, teacher training, and even school management and culture.

Throughout this process, we remained aware that we had to make up for lost time without losing our national identity, while also keeping pace with the changes taking place around the world.

We know from experience that a people can win their independence through courage and resilience. But we also know that independence can only be consolidated through knowledge and education.

Without quality education, independence cannot fulfil its promise. And without qualified teachers whose work is properly valued, development cannot take root or bring tangible improvements to the lives of our people.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education is the foundation of everything we want to build for our future.

In classrooms, schools, universities and training centres – whether in the capital, Dili, in the poorest neighbourhoods of our cities or in the most remote villages – education is a powerful force for tackling the root causes of poverty,

diversifying our economy, strengthening democratic institutions or simply nurturing in our young people the ability to dream and strive for an ideal.

The Government has a responsibility to ensure that every child and every young person has a genuine opportunity to learn, develop and build their future.

That is why, when we speak of political priorities, we cannot focus solely on producing plans and documents. State institutions must translate those priorities into tangible results in schools and in the lives of students.

Accordingly, the Government has made a series of commitments, which it is implementing and will continue to fulfil:

- To strengthen initial and continuing teacher training, ensuring that all teachers have access to up-to-date knowledge, modern teaching methods and ongoing pedagogical support;
- To progressively improve teachers' working conditions, particularly in rural and more remote areas, where the difficulties are greatest;
- To invest in better-quality, more functional school infrastructure, because the quality of education also depends on an appropriate physical environment;
- To promote inclusive education that respects diversity and ensures opportunities for all, leaving no one behind;
- To make responsible use of new technologies that keep pace with a changing world, always in the service of learning and never as a substitute for the human role of teachers; and

- To strengthen management, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, ensuring that policies translate into genuine improvements in teaching and student learning.

We cannot promise quick solutions. We are a young country, with many sectors requiring attention, limited resources and complex challenges.

The road ahead is indeed long, and there are no shortcuts. But we can promise that education is a priority sector for this Government, as a fundamental pillar of national development.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The specific theme of this ceremony speaks of teachers as agents of transformation. This carries an enormous responsibility.

Every teacher is shaping the future of Timor-Leste. Teachers do not merely impart knowledge. By educating Timorese children and young people, our teachers are shaping the citizens of our country.

And this goes far beyond teaching subjects and preparing students for a profession. It also means nurturing individuals who can think for themselves, exercise critical judgement, uphold the values of solidarity, respect and honesty and, above all, possess the skills to participate actively in the social, economic and political life of our country.

The Government expects – and needs – teachers to adopt a reflective, innovative, ethical and responsible approach, critically assessing their own practices, continuously seeking to improve, and remaining open to new methods and ways of reaching their students.

Teachers themselves must embrace a culture of lifelong learning, updating their knowledge and developing their skills.

Allow me to highlight here the strategic role of INFORDEPE in teacher training, the updating of teachers' knowledge and skills, and their professional development, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and other educational bodies.

These institutions, as well as teachers themselves, must remain firmly committed to integrity and to combating corruption, favouritism and discrimination, while demonstrating a clear commitment to the quality of education and the creation of safe, inclusive and stimulating learning environments.

Ongoing dialogue and cooperation between the Ministry of Education, training institutions, schools, teachers and students are essential to turning policy guidelines into real changes in schools and classrooms.

It is through this collective effort that we can better align teacher training with the needs of the education system, strengthen school leadership and management, and ensure that nationally defined priorities produce results for students throughout the country.

I therefore reaffirm the Government's commitment to strengthening the education system and creating the conditions for gradual but consistent improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, in close cooperation with all those who make education a living reality in Timor-Leste every day.

I ask you, our teachers, not to give up on our children and young people. Even when conditions are far from ideal, even when resources are lacking. I know how easy it is to become discouraged. I know there are frustrations.

But I also know, and I speak from personal experience, that a teacher can change a life. And by changing one life, a teacher can change a family, a community, a country.

In many respects, our teachers are our new fighters for national liberation. And they need the same courage, perseverance and vision to free our people from illiteracy, poverty and exclusion, ensuring access to knowledge and quality education.

Dear teachers,

Today, here in Dili, we celebrate World Teachers' Day, observed annually on 5 October. But it is not enough to "recognise" and "thank" you for your dedication to society once a year. The best way to express our gratitude is to value your profession in concrete, consistent and meaningful ways.

In Timor-Leste, teachers play an irreplaceable role. Many of you are educators, counsellors, community leaders and moral role models for young people, all at the same time. In many villages, the teacher is the face of the State. The first to arrive and often the last to give up.

I acknowledge that the Government must do more to value the role of teachers in our society. Recognition alone is not enough; we must ensure greater respect for your rights and more support in fulfilling your duties.

This means improving your working conditions and strengthening your dignity in the daily exercise of your profession. It also means enhancing your professional status, ensuring genuine access to continuing professional development and enabling your active participation in shaping and monitoring education policies.

This is particularly important in today's world of profound social, technological, economic and cultural transformations, with which Timor-Leste must keep pace.

Artificial intelligence, digital technologies and learning platforms all bring enormous opportunities, but also major challenges.

We cannot allow those without access to technology to be excluded. We cannot allow knowledge to become fragmented, fleeting and superficial. We cannot allow screens to cloud individual reflection or stifle critical thinking.

Technology must serve learning and human development, but it must never replace the essential role of teachers in guiding, educating and supporting students.

It is human relationships that educate: the attentive gaze of teachers, the right word at the right moment, the ability to guide, question and inspire.

We should not fear digital transformation or pedagogical innovation. Rather, we should fear our inability to adapt to yet another challenge facing the education sector.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I also appeal to everyone present to become a strong ally of the Government in the fight against social exclusion.

Promoting the dignity of our people is part of Timorese DNA. We must combat exclusion in every possible way. An education system that leaves people behind is not worthy of the name.

We must strengthen the inclusion of children with disabilities, support students facing social vulnerability, respect linguistic and cultural diversity, and promote gender equality in every school and at every level of education throughout the country.

Inclusive education is the first step towards a just and peaceful society. And we all share responsibility for this process.

Transforming education is a shared responsibility.

It is the responsibility of school leaders, who must support, guide and value their teachers. It is the responsibility of teacher training institutions, which must ensure solid, up-to-date and relevant preparation for today's challenges.

It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and other educational authorities, which must develop coherent, stable and consistent policies.

But it is also the responsibility of parents and communities, who must become involved in school life, respect teachers and support their children throughout their education.

To our international partners present here today, I wish to express, on behalf of the Government of Timor-Leste, our gratitude for your contributions to teacher training, strengthening our institutions and improving our schools.

I also wish to acknowledge your commitment to aligning your support with national priorities, strengthening rather than replacing the capacity of the State.

Dear young people and students,

You are the reason behind all these efforts. Without you, there would be no point in speaking of education policies.

Make the most of the opportunity to learn. Ask questions, read, investigate, get involved and discover the joy of knowledge. School is not simply a place to "move on to the next year"; it is a place where you can become free, responsible and creative citizens.

Among you, there will surely be some of Timor-Leste's future teachers. This is a noble choice for your own future and for the future of our country.

Our country needs committed, well-trained young people who are passionate about teaching and ready to carry forward this mission of shaping future generations.

When we look back, we see a people who were able to resist, to endure suffering, to rise again and to win their independence with dignity.

When we look to the future, we must see a people capable of learning, innovating, creating and competing in a rapidly changing world.

The bridge between that past of struggle and this future of hope is called education. And the pillars supporting that bridge are our teachers.

On behalf of the Government of Timor-Leste, I wish to thank all the teachers throughout our country, recognising their role – sometimes overlooked or insufficiently acknowledged – in building our State and Nation.

And I wish to renew the Government's commitment to working tirelessly to improve the quality of education, for without it we cannot fulfil our ambition of sustainable development.

I invite you, as an educational community and as a nation, to make this celebration not merely an occasion for festivities, but also a moment of responsibility.

How can we, all those gathered here today, contribute to doing more and doing better for education in Timor-Leste?

If we can answer this question through actions, and not merely words, then we will truly be honouring our teachers and preparing the future of the next generation.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão