



Address by

H.E. Dr. José Ramos-Horta

President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

to

the 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

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Check against delivery

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers and Ambassadors,

Excellencies,

As I address this esteemed body, may I seize the opportunity to extend to you, Mr. President, my sincere and warm congratulations on your well-deserved election to preside over the 62nd session of the General Assembly.

In view of the constraints of time and in deference to all, I shall take no more than 10 minutes to share with Your Excellencies both some facts and reflections on the situation in my country as well as on select issues of regional and international concern.

Timor-Leste is encouraged by the fact the Secretary-General has convened the High-Level Event on Climate Change to be followed by the negotiations on the UN Framework Convention in Bali. The industrialized countries of the North bear an enormous responsibility for the damage done to our fragile eco-systems. They, more than anyone else, must reverse the course and lead the effort in saving this earth. However, we in the developing world cannot escape our own responsibilities. Demographic explosion and our own efforts, to catch up with the rich North, all contribute to the pressures on our land, forests, rivers, lakes and oceans. Let's put rhetoric aside and work as one to redress the enormous damage we have done to the common Home of Humanity.

1. The political situation in Timor Leste

In April/May 2006, less than 5 years after my country's accession to full independence, we were plunged into our first major crisis. The then President of the Republic, the Speaker of National Parliament and the Prime Minister jointly agreed to seek United Nations urgent assistance and the rapid intervention of friendly countries.

I wish to reiterate here our sincere gratitude to those who came to our assistance in this time of need. We are forever grateful to Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand and to Portugal – which dispatched a fully equipped company of its elite force, the National Republican Guard (GNR), from 20 thousand miles away.

The Security Council approved the deployment of an integrated mission, UNMIT, with a police component of 1,740 police. The deployment of UNPOL was understandably extremely slow – only in January 2007 was the projected force close to completion.

We have made significant progress since the dark weeks of April/May 2006. Presidential and Legislative elections were held between April and June 2007. The election campaign period was mostly free of violence and there were few reported irregularities. Though we are proud that the two elections were managed by our own agencies, we also acknowledge that the active support from UNMIT and other UN agencies like the UNDP were indispensable and crucial to enable us to undertake such a complex task.

While the result of the presidential election was warmly welcome by all including the defeated candidate, the same did not happen when a new government was announced following the June 30th legislative election.

Fretilin, the former ruling party, won most votes but not enough to govern on its own and after several weeks of lobbying it failed to forge a coalition to govern. A post-election four-party parliamentary alliance, opposed to Fretilin, secured 37 seats in the new Parliament of 65 seats, was invited to form government. There was violence in a number of locations in which local law enforcement elements were implicated but the swift UNPOL and ISF intervention succeeded in quickly controlling the situation. Our own defense force played a constructive role in helping to defuse the violence. I acknowledge also the role played by the Fretilin leadership in restraining their more passionate followers.

Law and order has been restored. However, the relative tranquility prevailing in the country is a precarious one and is due in a large measure to the effective role played by UNPOL, ISF and our own Defense Force. This will remain the case until such a time when our police force has been reconstructed and turned into a credible and effective force. This will take two to five years at a minimum. I wish to assure all that in the meantime, the East Timorese will continue a national dialogue so that we may reconcile and heal the wounds of the past.

Together with the Speaker of the National Parliament and the Prime Minister I have established a high level mechanism in order to provide a cohesive and unified East Timorese leadership on the security sector reform. An expert team of national and international advisers, working under our two Secretaries of State for Defense and Security, currently interfaces with UNMIT's own security sector reform group. Our shared goal is to ascertain a sound strategy for the appropriate reform of our police force and the development of our defense force.

2. The social situation in Timor Leste

The 2006 crisis caused widespread looting and destruction in the capital. More than 30 people died – more than 100 were wounded – and tens of thousands were displaced. We are slowly recovering. However, tens of thousands of people remain in precarious camps in the capital and elsewhere. I thank the international community, the UN and its agencies, IOM, and international NGOs for their generous and prompt assistance. The new government has pledged to cooperate with all to address the IDP situation.

The late rains of last year, floods and a locust plague have caused significant damage to our subsistence agriculture sector. As a result, an acute food shortage is foreseen in the coming months. The government is planning to purchase significant amounts of food items in the regional markets to make up for the food shortage.

Endowed with some oil and gas resources, Timor-Leste cannot complain of not having enough financial means to turn our economy around and lift the living standards of our people. According to a recent ADB report, Timor-Leste's economy will see a strong 22% growth this year due to our oil revenues and UN presence.

Based on Norway's expert advice, the previous National Parliament adopted the Petroleum Law which lays down strict guide-lines for the use and management of the oil and gas revenues. As of July 2007 our Petroleum Fund has accumulated over US\$1.4 billion. Monthly revenues of US\$100 million are being deposited in the Fund. However, this has not translated into any visible improvement in the lives of the poor.

During my brief tenure as Prime Minister (July 2006 – May 2007), working with my ministerial colleagues, and assisted by the World Bank and the IMF, I introduced some major reforms with a view to streamlining a number of complicated bureaucratic procedures so that we could fast-track budget execution and services delivery. The new government has also accepted my fiscal reform proposal that will turn Timor-Leste into a tax free country.

However, all this is not enough to improve the living standards of the people. The vast majority of the people who have been poor for centuries cannot and should not wait. I have pledged to be the President of the Poor and I intend to be their best advocate. I am establishing a fast-track mechanism under my personal leadership to provide direct assistance to individuals, groups or rural communities. The idea is that it should take not more than 10 working days for a decision to be made on a project and for the first installment of a grant to be disbursed. Coupled with public investments in infrastructure (roads, bridges, port and airport) and in the agriculture sector, Timor-Leste should see

in the medium term a significant reduction of unemployment and a decrease in the poverty levels.

Education and youth employment are areas that my presidency and the new government are prioritizing with more public spending. I have proposed the establishment of a permanent Youth Parliament with youth in the age bracket of 13 to 17 to be eligible to serve as Youth MPs for a certain period of the year. This is not only an effective and creative way to empower youth but it also serves as a unique leadership development process and as a school for future leaders.

My presidency, in partnership with the government which under our Constitution holds primary executive responsibility to provide services to the people, is determined to accomplish the Millenium Development Goals by 2015. Working together with Civil Society, Churches, the NGO's, the private sector and the international community we can do it. We owe it to the poor in our country. There cannot be nobler mission than freeing our fellow human beings from the slavery of poverty.

3. UN presence

We are cognizant of the fact that the international community faces a number of critical situations around the world, notably, in the Middle East, Somalia, Sudan-Darfur, Iraq, Afghanistan, to mention but a few that are far more serious than the situation in Timor-Leste and maybe are of greater strategic importance and implication for regional and world peace.

Hence, we are conscious that the East Timorese leadership and the people must make every effort to consolidate peace and stability in our country in order to free the UN from the burden in Timor-Leste resulting from the 2006 crisis, a crisis of our own making and for which we must take full responsibility with courage and humility. We hope that the UN will consider a longer-term engagement with us to further stabilize the situation, strengthen our national institutions and consolidate peace and democracy.

As the situation progresses, we hope that the Peace Building Commission will consider placing Timor-Leste on its agenda as a follow-up to UNMIT.

4. Human Rights, Rule of Law, Justice

When sovereignty was transferred to the people of Timor-Leste in May 2002, what existed then was no more than the sketch, the idea of a modern, democratic state. We had to build our country from scratch. Yet while we failed in many areas, we succeeded in others. We have succeeded in not abandoning our deep commitment to human rights and the rule of law. Timor-Leste stands among very few that have ratified all seven core Human Rights Treaties. We are grateful to the High Commissioner for Human Rights for assisting us in our reporting obligations to the Treaty bodies.

The events of 2006 led to serious breaches of human rights, including the right to life. Our justice sector, though still fragile, is coping well with its responsibilities thanks to generous assistance from a number of friendly countries through the UNDP. The report, conclusions and recommendations of the Independent Commission of Enquiry mandated by the Secretary-General are duly considered by our respective State bodies.

Timor-Leste seeks a seat on the Human Rights Council for the term 2008-2011 and we are particularly pleased and grateful that many countries have so far expressed support for our candidacy. I wish to assure all that as a member of the HRC, Timor-Leste will favor dialogue on serious human rights situations; will prioritize strengthening the thematic procedures, promoting ratification of existing human rights treaties, and strengthening national and regional human rights mechanisms.

As a country born of centuries of colonization, with its own weaknesses and failings, but rich in experience, both good and bad, we believe in dialogue to solve national and international disputes, in the power of ideas, in partnerships and cooperation to address regional and international challenges.

5. Commission on Truth and Friendship (CTF)

In August 2005, the Presidents of Timor-Leste and Indonesia inaugurated a forward-looking policy and mechanism of truth-finding as a means to address the violence of 1999 when the two countries parted ways. While there were some calls for the establishment of an ad hoc International Tribunal to try those responsible for the 1999 violence, the leaders of the two countries opted instead for a bi-national version of the South African Truth and Reconciliation process. This was a novel and unique approach to redress the wrongs of the past and being untested it provoked much criticism and opposition in certain quarters.

The 10 Commissioners of both sides are reaching the end of their mission. In early 2008 they will produce a report and recommendations and then the Heads of State and Government of the two countries, inspired by our two countries best interests and in

respect of truth and the interests of the victims, will review these recommendations and follow up where possible.

For our part in Timor-Leste, we remember our past and we honor our fallen heroes and victims. Many are alive and carry in their body and soul the suffering that was inflicted on them. But we have refused to be hostage to the past and to the temptation of seeking revenge. For Indonesia and Timor-Leste, two developing countries and emerging democracies, facing a multitude of domestic and regional challenges, we simply cannot walk the path some have suggested to us, namely the path of justice at any cost. We must guard against destabilizing our fragile democracies.

6. International and regional relations

Timor-Leste is expanding and consolidating our relations with the region and the world. We are an active member of the ASEAN Regional Forum and working towards full membership in ASEAN. We are an active observer in the Pacific Islands Forum and are a member of the Comunidade dos Paises de Lingua Portuguesa.

7. The situation in Myanmar

Excellencies,

I shall now turn to some international issues of concern to Timor-Leste. As a country of the region, Timor-Leste follows with deep concern and disappointment the developments in Myanmar. As human beings and friends we are distressed at the deteriorating social, humanitarian and political conditions in that neighboring country.

The leaders in Myanmar must not continue to hold Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung Suu Kji and the entire nation hostage to a mind-set that belongs to the Cold War and to policies that have brought international opprobrium and economic ruin to a country endowed with vast natural resources and with a very proud people.

On the other hand, we do not believe that a strategy of isolating and punishing a whole community is the best way to advance the cause of freedom and democracy - for the actual consequence of such a strategy is the further isolation and impoverishment of a whole people.

8. Nuclear proliferation

Timor-Leste commends the six-party on North Korea who have achieved some positive results in inducing North Korea to reverse its nuclear weapons capability. This modest success shows that patient diplomacy may advance even the most intractable conflicts when the parties involved identify common concern and interest.

On the other hand, Timor-Leste is deeply concerned with the climate of mistrust and confrontation as regards the situation in Iran. Iran is entitled to explore every peaceful means to acquire technology that would make it less reliant on non-renewable sources of energy. No one disputes such a right for Iran or for any other nation. However, Iran must do more to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency and to reassure its neighbors and the rest of the world that it is not seeking to acquire nuclear weapons capability.

Asia is the most nuclearized region of the world. I don't know that we should be proud of such a status. The Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) is indeed madness as the acronym itself suggests. Our scientists have developed Frankstein monsters that may well destroy us all - either by design if the weapons fall into the hands of non-state actors or by accident.

Those powers that possess nuclear weapon should reengage and dismantle all such weapons and all other forms of weapons of mass destruction.

History has shown us how mighty empires and regimes built on terror and fear, have come and gone, crumbled in spite of their arsenals.

9. Death Penalty

Timor-Leste is part of a cross regional initiative calling for a moratorium on the death penalty. We note that the trend towards the worldwide abolition of the death penalty continues.

10. Situation in Darfur

Timor-Leste commends the African Union and the United Nations and all those in government and those individuals who have done their very best to end the suffering of the people there, a suffering now compounded by natural calamity. In the midst of such tragedy we can retain some consolation and inspiration as we see millions of people around the world, traversing religions and cultures, joining together in solidarity with the victims of Darfur.

11. Situation in Palestine

As a small and newly-independent nation and a friend of Israel, Timor-Leste cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of the Palestinian people, many times victims, victims of Israeli obstinate policies of occupation and discrimination, victims of manipulation of regional powers, victims of their own sectarian division and violence. While Timor-Leste does not subscribe to the many one-sided anti-Israel resolutions adopted throughout the year in various UN bodies, the facts on the ground show a whole people living on the

edge of desperation as a result of decades of humiliation, exclusion and violence. Timor-Leste joins the international community in calling for the implementation of the road map leading to the formal establishment of a viable Palestinian State.

12. Western Sahara

Over 100,000 people in Western Sahara continue to live in precarious camps following the war that ensued after the 1975 Tri-Partite Madrid Agreement which split the former Spanish colony into two, for Mauritania and Morocco. Timor-Leste is encouraged and commends both Morocco and the Polisario Front for the recent talks held in Long Island under United Nations good-offices. We believe that only dialogue may bring about a resolution of this decades-old conflict which along with the Palestinian conflict is becoming one of the world's longest running problems.

13. Indigenous peoples' rights

More than five hundred years ago, long after Chinese navigators and explorers had circumnavigated the globe, European kings, navigators, missionaries, adventurers and mercenaries began the great European conquest of the world. In the process tens of millions of people were subjugated, colonized; fortunes and empires were made at the expense of the peoples they came into contact with; new diseases were brought into the new colonies; slavery uprooted at least 10 million from the African continent alone.

Millions of indigenous peoples were decimated by wars and diseases; their death and land gave birth to new nations that were alien to their sacred birth place. This very island of Manhattan was once sovereign home to native Americans. This is all part of the history of the world, the history of European conquest with its glory and tragedy. Timor-Leste commends the General Assembly for finally adopting the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is the least that we can do to redress the grave injustices done to some of the earlier civilizations of the world.

14. UN reform

Consultations and negotiations on reform of the UN system and in particular of the Security Council should start; rather than desiring drastic reforms, we may want to adopt an incremental approach. The SC must be incrementally expanded to include major powers like India, Indonesia, Japan, Brazil, South Africa and Germany.

It is an absurdity that Asia which contains almost half of the world population should be so grossly under-represented.

May God the Almighty and the Merciful bless us all.