

26 January 2001

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
to the Security Council**

I am honored to be able to participate in this open debate of the Security Council on East Timor. I would like to thank in particular you, Mr. President, for your efforts in making it possible for me to address the Council. My participation in this debate is part of the efforts to foster closer co-operation and co-ordination between the UN's main bodies and actors.

I made a weeklong visit to the Southeast Asian region from 10 to 17 January 2001, visiting Singapore, East Timor and Indonesia. My visit was at the invitation of the Singaporean and Indonesian Governments and UNTAET. In East Timor, I had a series of meetings in Dili, during which I was briefed extensively about the activities of UNTAET by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and by other officials of UNTAET. I also met with local political leaders, including Xanana Gusmao, as well as with the Force Commander of the UN Peacekeeping Force and the Commissioner of Civil Police. Finally, I had the opportunity to meet with the Heads of United Nations Agencies and with representatives of the local diplomatic community.

In addition to my programme in Dili, I paid a half-day visit to Suai, the site of a massacre in 1999, where I was given a briefing on the various aspects of the operation of District Administration and the Sector West Peacekeeping Force. In Suai, I had discussions with the members of the District Advisory Council and other local representatives.

A detailed account of my visit, including a list of all meetings, can be found on my web site.

At the outset, I wish to pay tribute to the women and men, civilian and military, who serve the United Nations in East Timor, and to commend the leadership of Mr. Vieira de Mello. The working conditions - both in the physical and in the political sense - in the Mission area are very difficult. It is crucial that the Mission gets all necessary support from Headquarters in order to overcome these difficulties. In addition, close co-operation between all UN agencies working in this comprehensive UN mission is vital for a successful outcome.

The main purpose of my visit to East Timor was to observe, in light of our recent discussions on the Brahimi report, on how a comprehensive and complex peace operation works at the field level. The visit allowed me to assess first hand the situation in East Timor.

In East Timor there is a clear gap between the expectations of the local population and what may be expected to be a painstakingly slow process of nation building. This is a gap common in post-conflict situations. It exists both at the grassroots level, echoed by the everyday concerns of the

people I met in Suai, and at the political level, reflected by growing calls among the local political leadership for moves toward immediate independence.

In a country that has never in its recorded history enjoyed self-determination and democratic rule, this desire for an immediate solution is understandable. But it should be tempered by a realization that building democratic institutions is, even under the best of circumstances, a complex and delicate task. However, I am sure the people in East Timor, who have ultimate responsibility for the future of their country, remember this during the coming months, as the political calendar brings them closer to independence. Furthermore, I trust that the Council will bear this in mind in its deliberations on the issue.

The East Timorese society faces the fundamental question of justice versus reconciliation. There seems to be a genuine and commendable readiness among the political leadership to move toward national reconciliation, with maximum inclusiveness of former pro-autonomy elements now in West Timor. At the same time, there is a strong body of opinion, especially at the grassroots level, calling for justice as the precondition for any true reconciliation. In my view, these views are not mutually exclusive. The pursuit of justice is fundamental to nation building and to any UN peace operation. Those responsible for human rights violations and crimes against humanity must be brought to justice. At the same time reconciliation - at all levels - should be actively promoted.

Despite the commendable progress achieved, East Timor will need the assistance and presence of the international community for a long time to come, both to continue to maintain peace and to support reconstruction and nation building. We cannot afford to exit East Timor prematurely or without a well-prepared strategy. The 'Timorization' of local administration is crucial and should be pursued vigorously. But it cannot wholly substitute for international presence in the near future.

UN peacekeeping is still needed to ensure the safety and security of the population and overall stability of the country. It would be unrealistic and even irresponsible to expect or plan a quick pullout.

I also wish to emphasize that the operation must be given the resources commensurate with its mandate and that these resources must be provided from assessed contributions. In this connection, I also wish to express my support to the Council's request for increased flexibility in the use of assessed resources allocated to complex peacekeeping operations such as UNTAET. I will draw once again the attention of the relevant General Assembly bodies to this request.

The situation along the border areas between West Timor and East Timor is of grave concern. Even though I did not have the opportunity to visit West Timor, it became clear to me that much more needs to be done to disarm and disband the militias. This is essential to allow the UN to return to West Timor to deal with the refugee problem. This is also indispensable in order to stop the violence against the civilian population, including women. I should point out that during my discussions in Jakarta with the President, Minister of Foreign Affairs and other high-level

officials, Indonesian officials gave assurances of their co-operation and determination to facilitate refugee return. They expressed their hope that the United Nations and especially the UNHCR could soon return to West Timor. As for my part, I underscored the need to implement strictly Security Council Resolution 1319. I also expressed the hope that the relationship between Indonesia and UNTAET would continue to be based on the joint communiqué of 29 February 2000, and the Memorandum of Understanding of April 2000. Again, my interlocutors expressed their commitment to good-neighborly relations with East Timor.

The success of UNTAET, as is the case in any UN peace operation, depends on the full co-operation of all parties.

To conclude, and in recognition of the UNTAET performance, I would like to stress the urgency of the need to strengthen UN peace operations through implementing the recommendations of the Brahimi report. Moreover, I would like to stress one important commitment that the Council made when adopting its recommendations on the Brahimi report, which is relevant to our discussions today. The Council undertook to ensure that the mandated tasks of peacekeeping operations are appropriate to the situation on the ground, including such factors as the prospects for success, the potential need to protect civilians and the possibility that some parties may seek to undermine peace through violence.