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RDTL government, PNTL and development partners discuss needs of police Special Units

(Dili, 2 June) – The Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Timor-Leste, Ambassador Kamallesh Sharma, today praised the clear “commitment and engagement” of the RDTL leadership to addressing the challenges that the Timorese police force (PNTL) has to face as it builds and strengthens its special units. He was speaking at a 2-day workshop to assess the needs of PNTL’s special units which opened in Dili this morning. The event, organised by the RDTL government with support from UNMISSET and UNDP, has wide ranging-participation not only of the Timorese leadership, PNTL and UNPOL but also of development partners.

The SRSG said that border control, violent disturbances, threat of disorder in the cities, are all specific challenges for the police force to address and which require specific capacities. “How these units should develop in the context of civic liberties and freedoms and human rights standards, as well as their requirements, are a matter for focus and constructive deliberation by the government of Timor-Leste and all its supportive development partners”, he added.

The RDTL President Xanana Gusmão urged PNTL to “learn intensively and as much as possible” from UNPOL in the short time remaining before PNTL takes over full responsibility for maintaining law and order in Timor-Leste.

The SRSG outlined UNMISSET’s three main strategies in ensuring the smooth transition to the post-UNMISSET period: renewed efforts at enhancing the ownership by PNTL and the RDTL government in planning and carrying out activities for PNTL’s institution-building; assistance in addressing key internal security challenges which have emerged since late last year; and lastly, commitment in coordinating and sustaining, within UNMISSET’s mandate period, the international community’s technical and financial assistance for the sustainable development of PNTL.

Addressing the representatives of the development partners, Xanana Gusmão said he hoped that they would take notice of the considerable progress made so far and also of the shortcomings and requirements [of PNTL]. He added that as the Timorese are just embarking on the effort to build

up and sustain all these institutions, “we will obviously continue to need a lot of assistance from the international community”.

Police representatives from the UK, Portugal, US, Australia and Malaysia gave presentations on how special units operate in these countries, and PNTL explained the role and requirements of the four special units – Rapid Intervention Unit, Border Services, Rapid Deployment Service and Strategic Information Unit.

Away from resources, the issues of training, coordination and accountability will feature prominently in the discussion of the working groups. The SRSG stressed that human security, human rights and responsible community policing elements should be an integral part of all police training. He said that the government accepts that the issues of human rights safeguards are fundamental in realizing their strategic vision for PNTL, and for the special units to operate within the rule of law with accountability, impartiality and legitimacy, and with the confidence and support of the citizens. “Special units are special because they have special powers and authority to protect peace and security”, said the SRSG, adding that “they also bear the tremendous responsibility to ensure that this authority is not misused or abused”. Earlier the President had the same message, saying that police have to earn respect from the people through their actions.

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