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Consultation meeting on justice sector: 'Significant achievements but many challenges remain'

(Dili, 30 September) – The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Timor-Leste, Sukehiro Hasegawa, said that there have been significant developments in the justice sector over the past 18 months but many challenges remain to be addressed. The DSRSG was speaking at the opening of a consultation meeting which was held today in Dili. The aim of the meeting, jointly sponsored by UNMISSET and UNDP, was to review the progress already made and to identify the support that will still be needed for the institutional development of the sector, and for the serious crimes process, during the remainder of UNMISSET's mandate and beyond.

The DSRSG highlighted the establishment of both the District Courts and the Court of Appeal, the appointment of judges, and the continued training of PNTL and within the prison system as some of the achievements of the past year and a-half. But he cautioned that the justice sector still faces many challenges and tasks if stability is to be ensured. Immediate tasks include the problem of excessive delays in the Courts, the recruitment of additional administrative staff, continued and consistent training for those in the justice sector, including judges, the drafting and approval of key legislation, and the establishment of independent and transparent oversight mechanisms for prisons and for the government.

UNDP presented a 'programme package for strengthening the justice system in Timor-Leste' for consideration by the meeting. The programme, with an estimated cost of just over US\$ 3 million over 3 years, makes proposals for what needs to be done in areas in the Ministry of Justice, including the Ministry, the Judicial Training Centre, Public Defenders and Prisons, the Courts and the Public Prosecution Service. It also details the assistance being provided by partners such as UNMISSET, UNICEF, Portugal, USAID, Asia Foundation, ASF[Avocats sans Frontières], IFES [International Foundation for Election Systems], Malaysia and IDLO [International Development Law Organization]. UNDP itself, Norway, Belgium and Denmark are helping to fund the programme but it still has a funding gap of nearly US\$ 2 million.

The Vice- Minister of Justice [Manuel Abrantes], the President of the Court of Appeal [Cláudio Ximenes], and representatives from across the justice sector took part in the consultation, alongside development partners and other UN member states with representation in Dili, NGOs, academics and private lawyers.

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