



PRESIDÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA

GABINETE DO PRESIDENTE

Statement by

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Noble Peace Prize Laureate 1996

to

the 63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

*NEW YORK, 25 SEPTEMBER 2008*

Mr. President, Majesties,  
Heads of States and Government,  
Ministers, Excellencies,

First, it is my duty to congratulate you Mr. President for your well deserved election to preside over the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly.

The rising energy cost, the growing demand for oil supply from industrialized countries and emerging economies, rising food price, scarcity of land for agriculture and of water in many regions, climate change, are only some of the indicators of serious non-conventional security threats we all face now and increasingly in the future.

However, crisis also offers opportunities. For decades hundreds of millions of people the world over moved away from their ancestral lands into the cities in search for jobs and a better life as governments tend to concentrate their attention and resources there, neglecting the rural people. However as the cities swelled in numbers, the dream of a better life turns into despair. Maybe the 21<sup>st</sup> century will see a return to our roots, if governments seize on this crisis and seriously invest in job creation schemes in the rural areas, particularly in the agriculture sector to increase food production.

The rising food price, whatever the root causes, has set back the progress made in many developing countries towards meeting the MDG. Unless there is a concerted effort on the part of the international community to significantly increase development assistance and market access, it is next to impossible for poor non-oil exporting countries to achieve even the modest goals we have set for ourselves in 2000 to halve poverty in the world by 2015. Donor countries must quickly refocus their development assistance in the agriculture sector, including small family and community plots, land protection, water harvesting, by increasing the ODA for agriculture from a mere 3% in 2006 to at least 30%. (Note: In 1980 the share of the total ODA for agriculture was 17% and this dropped to 2.9% in 2006).

In this regard Timor-Leste supports the Secretary-General's timely initiative in establishing a High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis and a Comprehensive Framework for Action to address immediate as well as longer-term global food needs and to build the resilience of the most vulnerable countries.

As a newly independent country emerging from decades of violence, Timor-Leste has benefited much from the generosity of the international community. Donors will say that they have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to my country in the last few years. This is true.

However, we must ask ourselves whether this aid has contributed to improve the lives of the vast majority of the people. The answer is yes and no. But we all could do better if the staggering percentage of aid money paid out to cover endless study missions, extremely generous consultant fees, repetitive reports and recommendations stating the obvious, were to be spent on the ground in cash for work schemes and small rural development initiatives.

Timor-Leste is a LDC country. However, the Almighty God has bestowed on us some modest oil, gas and other mineral wealth.

Our oil and gas revenues are modest, averaging only US\$100 million a month. It could be argued that for a country of slightly over one million people, this is not too bad. By the end of this year, our Petroleum Fund which was established in 2005 will have accumulated in excess of US\$3,000 million (three billion), all invested in US Treasury Bonds. A writer in The Economist recently stated that those who invest in US Treasury Bond are people who like to lose money. We agree with this remark and Timor-Leste is seeking to reinvest our modest revenues in diversified portfolios across the world.

While our first obligation is to make use of our oil wealth towards a sustainable development of our country and addressing the immediate needs of our poorest, we are not indifferent to the suffering of our fellow human beings in other parts of the world.

When the Asia region was hit in Dec 2005 by a tsunami, our government contributed US\$50,000 for the victims in Indonesia and the common people did their own collection of donations and raised an additional US\$70,000.

Now in response to several natural disasters that have affected tens of millions of our fellow human beings, Timor-Leste has promptly decided to donate:

1. US\$500,000 for the victims of the earthquake that hit the Chinese province of Sichuan;
2. US\$500,000 for the victims of cyclone Nargis that hit Myanmar in May 2 to be channeled through the ASEAN Secretariat;
3. US\$500,000 for Cuba to assist the victims of cyclones Gustav and Ike, to be channeled directly to the Cuban authorities.

Starting in 2009 Timor-Leste will contribute US\$1 million annually to assist children's related programs in Myanmar and Somalia through UN agencies like UNICEF and UNHCR.

We believe that even though we are poor, or because we are poor, we should better understand and feel the pain of the poorest of the poor, and must be among the first to help others less fortunate than us.

Mr. President, Majesties, Highnesses, Excellencies,

In my address today, I shall touch upon only three international issues, Myanmar, the US embargo against Cuba and the question of Western Sahara.

Timor-Leste's stance on Myanmar is aligned with the stance taken by our immediate neighbours of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). We particularly believe that while strong denunciations of the abuses are justifiable and that sanctions might be morally justifiable, there cannot be a long-term solution in Myanmar without the consent of and full partnership of the army. Hence, the challenge for those involved is to persuade the military that their own interests as a group will not be compromised in any future democratic arrangement. Any other strategy seeking to sideline the military or that they see as undermining their power and future safety will not succeed and will only prolong the agony of all in that sad country.

Cyclones Gustav and Ike that brought thorough devastation to the Caribbean ruined the Cuban economy. The material losses are staggering with initial estimates totaling at least US\$5,000 million.

We have almost 700 East Timorese medical students in Cuba and over 140 are studying medicine in our National University with Cuban medical instructors. In addition there are almost 300 Cuban doctors working in our country distributed through all districts and sub-districts. Cuban adult education specialists assist us in adult literacy campaign benefiting thousands of adults. The costs of these programs are covered almost entirely by Cuba.

While I commend the US and any country that stands for universal democratic values and provide moral support for those promoting democracy in their own country, I submit that punitive measures imposed on poor developing countries for the perceived sins of their leaders cannot be morally justified.

As a friend of the US, I humbly appeal to the next US Administration and Congress to lift the embargo on Cuba. Such a gesture would be an honourable one and my admiration for the US would only increase. As it is, as I witness the impact of US sanctions on a small developing country and its refusal to provide assistance to Cuba following the devastation caused by cyclones Gustav and Ike, my heart bleeds in sorrow and my admiration for the US seriously diminishes.

In this regard, I wish to reiterate our most heartfelt sympathy and solidarity with the people of Haiti and others in the Caribbean region that were affected by the recent natural disasters.

In regards to the situation in Western Sahara, Timor-Leste is guided by the stance taken by the regional organization that is most competent on this matter, the African Union, and by UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, as well the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, all of which clearly and unequivocally recognize the inalienable right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination. This is the core of the issue and the root cause of this ongoing conflict. Hence, Timor-Leste joins with the African Union in calling for the strict respect for the inalienable right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.

I now turn to the situation in my own country.

On 11<sup>th</sup> February I was almost fatally shot. I escaped by an act of God and thanks to the professionalism and dedication of doctors and nurses at the Australian army medical centre in Dili and the doctors and nurses in the Darwin Royal Hospital. To them and to all who have prayed for my life and recovery, I

reiterate my eternal gratitude. I stood at the frontier between Life and Death, saw darkness of death and the beauty of life that I almost left behind.

The attack on me and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao shocked the nation and my near death served to unite the people in opposing violence. Since then the situation in Timor-Leste has been the most peaceful in many years without any politically motivated violence registered so far and even common criminality has been significantly reduced.

The Government led by Mr. Xanana Gusmao, a resistance hero, has made enormous efforts in stabilizing the country and in delivering services to the people. The progress is visible. A growing number of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) caused by the 2006 crisis is returning home. Most camps that existed for two years are now empty.

More than 700 former soldiers who were at the origin of the 2006 mutiny have accepted a Government financial package and returned home.

On the economic front, our real GDP will register 7% growth by the end of this year. However, if we factor in oil and gas revenues, our economic growth will be around 19%. While our real annual per capita GDP is less than US\$400, this figure jumps to over US\$4,000 if we factor in oil and gas revenues.

However, we would not have succeeded in pulling back from the brink without the prompt and steadfast support from the international community.

I thank the Secretary-General and through him the entire UN family and in particular those serving in my country in different capacities for their selfless contribution to preserving peace in Timor-Leste.

I also thank Australia and New Zealand for maintaining a robust and credible security force in my country in assistance to, and close coordination with, our government and UNMIT under the leadership of Dr. Atul Khare, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who is a most compassionate human being, and a dedicated and tireless professional.

The professionalism of the International Security Forces is visible to all and the behaviour of the soldiers is irreproachable. The same can be said of the UN police force in my country comprising police from 40 countries with particular reference to Formed Police Units from Portugal, Pakistan, Malaysia and Bangladesh.

We are blessed by The Almighty with non-negligible resources and can count on the generosity of our development partners but challenges remain complex and multifaceted. However, with a shared vision and commitment to serve the poorest of our people, I'm confident we will meet the Millennium Development Goals. We cannot fail. We shall not fail.

May God the Almighty and the Merciful bless us All.

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