

By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

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UN HANDS OVER POLICING TO TIMORESE IN ERMERA DISTRICT

In a ceremony in Ermera today policing authority in Ermera District was formally handed over by the UN Police (UNPOL) to the Timor-Leste Police Service (TLPS). Ermera is the fifth such district, after Aileu, Manatuto, Manufahi and Ainaro, in which the TLPS now has overall policing authority. The TLPS is expected to assume such authority in all of the country's districts by January 2004.

The handover ceremony in Ermera which was attended by TLPS Commissioner Paulo Martins; Sub. Inspector Mariano Martins Soares, the Ermera District Commander; Saturnino Bato, the Deputy Ermera District Administrator and representatives of UNPOL, was addressed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Kamallesh Sharma.

Mr. Sharma noted the unique challenges the police officers of Ermera, who have few vehicles and limited communication equipment, face in the mountainous district where roads are often inaccessible. "By all accounts you have embraced the challenge of these increased responsibilities with gusto", said the SRSG.

"Policing is not about computers and high technology", said Mr Sharma. "Policing is about people -- and how you can manage to develop strong relations of trust with the community". He urged the TLPS officers to seek sustainable and creative solutions to overcome their lack of resources.

The SRSG praised the low crime level in the area, saying, "I have been assured by local people that the community welcomes your visible presence as a sign of order and stability". Nonetheless, he urged the TLPS officers to pay special attention to the human rights and dignity of community members. Only by doing this, particularly



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during negotiations or arrests, he said, can you “justify the high expectations that the society has of you”.

Mr. Sharma highlighted one concern, the high incidence of domestic violence in the area, saying, “it is not tolerated in any country of the world.” In order to help the TLPS officers contend with the problem, he said, “I have instructed the office of my Gender Adviser to work with local trainers in this district to reduce the incidents of domestic violence”.

The TLPS will have a force of 150 officers policing Ermera, with two and eventually three international advisors. While urging the TLPS to draw on the rich experience of these technical advisers, he said, “the time for the international community to take the lead on policing in this district has come to an end.”

End

