

By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

Dili, 9 December 2002

DONORS' CONFERENCE UNDERWAY IN DILI

On Monday, in Dili, at the opening session of a two-day donors' conference, formally called "Timor-Leste and Development Partners Meeting", Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri thanked the more than 200 representatives of the international donor community, members of missions and agencies based in Timor-Leste for coming, saying that the effect of last week's day of violence was to "demonstrate the fragility of our new nation."

Mr. Akatiri declared it his hope that the donors meeting -- the sixth in three years and the first to be held in Timor-Leste since Independence -- would strengthen the partnership between his Government and the donor community. He said the aim is to deliver "the sustainable economic and human development which will improve the living standards of the people".

In his speech, President Xanana Gusmao drew the attention of the delegates to the "the crying need for a better involvement of communities, through capable and legitimate leadership". He said this was the only way to deal with the "vacuum of power" that is felt at the grass roots level. He also mentioned a second crying need -- "for mechanisms to deal with the immediate basic needs of the population". Only by addressing such needs, particularly for the poor in more rural areas, said the President, "can the problem of continuous migration to Dili in search of dollars" be solved.

President Gusmao, citing the fact that the majority of the nation's population is under 35-years-old, said that professional training is critically needed. He also reaffirmed the government's commitment to "move forward with national dialogues, as a form of public debate of the nation's problems".



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The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Kamallesh Sharma drew attention to Timor-Leste's development challenges and to some of the young nation's successes. "A significant proportion of the population, 41 per cent, lives below the poverty line and more than three-quarters of the population is dependent on agricultural activities", he said. He added that the unemployment rate in urban areas remains high, particularly among the youth, currently estimated at 43 per cent in Dili and Baucau. He also said that nearly half of the adult population has difficulty in reading and writing.

Despite such sobering figures, Mr. Sharma said it should be recognised that the Government and the people of Timor-Leste have made significant progress in economic and social terms within a short time span. He cited the fact that agricultural production and GDP had recovered to pre-1999 levels, and primary school enrolment has reached the level of 95 per cent. He also cited some success in infrastructural rehabilitation throughout the country including road repair and the provision of water and power.

Mr. Sharma said that institution-building and human resource capacity-building in the public sector is being undertaken by international civilian advisors, both through 100 'stability posts' and 'development advisors' who are provided by donors, either through UNDP or bilaterally. He added, however, that the number of development advisors still falls far short of the required level. "I would appeal to all partners to examine how this situation can be redressed".

The SRSG urged the continued support of the multilateral and bilateral donors saying, "the economic and social well-being of Timor-Leste is vital for the long-term stability of the country".

In his introductory remarks to the conference, Mr. Jemal-ud-din Kassum, Vice President of the World Bank, praised the democratic transition of power six months ago and the widespread public consultation that led to creation of Timor-Leste's National Development Plan and of "government workers and elected officials taking the reins of government into their own hands".



MEDIA BRIEFING NOTE

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Mr. Kassum also praised the “impressive achievements” of the young nation, citing signs of increased health service delivery to rural communities, increased primary enrolment and the development of an integrated planning and budgeting system.

Mr. Kassum said, in reference to the violence of 04 December, that the World Bank extends its condolences to the families of those who died. He added that the international community “will do everything within our respective powers to help the government as it strengthens its own institutions to enable them to better avoid such sad events.” The World Bank Vice President said, “We believe that functional law and order services, creating a context of democratic stability, are a precondition for economic development”.

The donors' conference, which is being held at Dili's Hotel Timor and sponsored jointly by the Timor-Leste Government and the World Bank, concludes tomorrow, 10 December, with a press conference to report some of its accomplishments.

