

By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

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GRADUATION DAY FOR TIMOR-LESTE DEFENCE FORCE RECRUITS

Two hundred-and-sixty Timor-Leste Defence Force (TLDF) recruits, 27 of them women, put on a display of marching skills and combat tactics for their families, government leaders and other dignitaries, at their graduation ceremony today at the TLDF Training Centre in Metinaro. The graduates comprise two companies of the Second Battalion of the Defence Force. They are the third group of recruits to graduate from the Training Centre since it opened in 2001.

TLDF Commander, Brig. Gen. Taur Matan Ruak congratulated the new troops, adding, "To be a good soldier you must know your duties and responsibilities, and that takes good training". He also passed along greetings from President Xanana Gusmão, who could not attend the ceremony, but sent some advice to the new soldiers. "Only by acting responsibly, will you have the respect of the people and the community you serve", he said.

The Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) Mr. Kamallesh Sharma congratulated the TLDF graduates and told them a key step to ensuring the success of the young nation "is the creation of a disciplined and truly professional defence force" that can provide reliable external and internal security. Mr. Sharma reminded the new soldiers that once the UN Peacekeeping Forces leave in 2004, "the onus will be upon you to defend your country with courage and honour and with exemplary rule of law".

The SRSG noted that the Defence Force already has command responsibility for Lautem District, and will continue to assume command responsibility as the PKF downsizes. "This process", he said, "can be maintained only if the Defence Force performs in a professional and responsible manner, which I am sure will be the case".



MEDIA BRIEFING NOTE

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The SRSG Mr. Sharma said that for people throughout the country, “you will be one of the visible symbols of nationhood. They will be watching your performance very closely”, he added. “Your professionalism must demonstrate to the people that this truly is the new, democratic Timor-Leste, in which defence and other security forces are not feared but instead respected”.

The President of the National Parliament, Francisco Guterres, praised the TLDF graduates who displayed their discipline during the ceremony by standing at attention for more than an hour in the full heat of the mid-day-sun. “During training”, he said, “you have not just empowered yourself physically. You’ve empowered your mind as well – to act justly and by a code of conduct”. Mr. Guterres told them it was their role to defend the nation and its integrity saying, “You are the fence for the gardeners to protect the plants”.

End

