

By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

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PORTUGUESE PEACEKEEPERS RECEIVE UN MEDALS

A battalion of Portuguese Peacekeepers was awarded UN Peacekeeping Medals today in a ceremony at Dili Stadium that comes near the end of the contingent's six-month tour in Timor-Leste. The battalion rotates home in January when a replacement battalion of Portuguese Peacekeepers arrives.

The award were presented to the troops by high level Timor-Leste Government leaders, including Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri and the President of the Parliament Francisco 'Lu Olo' Guterres; by the Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) Kamallesh Sharma and other UNMISSET representatives, and by members of the diplomatic community, including the Ambassador of Portugal, Rui Kuartim Santos.

The President of the National Parliament, Francisco Guterres thanked the Portuguese Battalion, known as Porbatt, for its contribution to Timor-Leste, and recalled several occasions, including the recent violence in both Baucau and Dili, when it was called upon. "The Portuguese military contingent performed with serenity and skill," he said, "and played a fundamental role in the preservation of the democratic institutions of our young nation, and in keeping public order under difficult circumstance".

In his address to the Portuguese Battalion, the SRSG Mr. Kamallesh Sharma said, "The United Nations Medal honours your professional contribution and recognizes the commitment and the solidarity that each one of you has shown in support of UNMISSET and the people of Timor-Leste".

The SRSG noted that the Porbatt had served Timor-Leste during an exciting period -- its first months as a newly independent nation. "Each one of you has played a vital, role in this process", he said.



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Mr. Sharma highlighted as well the battalion's contribution to civilian activities. The 645 troops of Porbatt, who operate in Dili and six other neighbouring districts, have provided medical treatment and food to the Timorese when needed. In addition, they have taught computer classes at Dili University, helped maintain a coffee plantation in Maubisse that was subsequently turned over to local Timorese, and organised a variety of cultural and sports activities including football and volleyball games for young Timorese.

The Peacekeeping Force Commander, Major Gen. Huck Gim Tan, in his address to the battalion, praised its quick responsiveness when needed and its overall skill and professionalism. The Force Commander said these attributes were demonstrated most recently during the 04 December unrest in Dili when "Your very presence ensured calm".

Major Gen. Tan also praised the battalion's leadership, saying, "many incidents were quickly brought under control and never allowed to escalate. You ensured that no excessive force was used." He cited for particular praise the battalion's Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Nuno Pires Da Silva, and the Contingent Commander, Col. Carlos Jeronimo.

The battalion's tour was marred unfortunately by the death of one of its troops, Private Diogo Miguel Dantas Ribeirinho, in the Bali bombing. The SRSR Mr. Sharma joined the PKF Force Commander in conveying his deep condolences to Private Ribeirinho's family and to the members of the battalion.

End



MEDIA BRIEFING NOTE

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