

MEDIA BRIEFING NOTE

By UNMISET Spokesperson's Office

Dili, 20 November 2002

WORK BEGINS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION

The Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, Marie Alkatiri, and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG), Sukehiro Hasekawa, today kicked off at a ceremony at the University of Timor-Leste, a three-day workshop to draft effective legislation to combat domestic violence in Timor-Leste. Domestic violence accounts for some 40 to 45 per cent of all crime cases in Timor-Leste.

The legislative workshop is being held by the Office for Promotion of Equality (OPE) within the Office of the Prime Minister and is supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The three-day workshop is intended to give all relevant sectors of society an opportunity to examine draft legislation to curb Domestic Violence and to consider recommendations before the legislation is formally presented to the Council of Ministers.

The Prime Minister in his opening remarks stressed the importance he puts in ending domestic violence and the importance of the workshop itself. "I postponed the Council of Ministers meeting in order to be here," he said, adding that the first step in addressing the problem is the awareness by the government itself and others that ending such violence is a priority.

Mr. Alkatiri noted that protection of women's rights is written into the country's Constitution. He also said that the government would soon be signing the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), possibly as soon as 10 December the last day of the 16 day campaign.

"But we are committed to internal laws," he said, as a way to provide protection for women and against domestic violence. "That's why this workshop is another



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landmark in this journey” to end such abuse. “We have to nip the problem in the bud”, he declared.

The Deputy SRSG and UN Resident Coordinator, Sukehiro Hasegawa, stressed the UN's commitment to ending domestic violence – what he called a world-wide problem not just one in Timor-Leste. Mr. Hasegawa quoted UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan saying “women continue to be victims of all forms of violence in every region, country and culture, regardless of their religion, race or ethnicity.”

“To reduce and eliminate all forms of violence”, said Mr. Hasegawa, “the United Nations has fully committed itself to promotion of gender equality and full observance of human rights for women and girls particularly in justice and in the court of law”. The UN Resident Coordinator cited the great progress the international community has made in the last 10 years “in reducing inequality and gender-based domestic violence”. For example, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights at Vienna recognised officially that gender-based violence was a human rights issue.

In the past year, said Mr. Hasegawa, the issue has gained much-needed attention particularly at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children. The Special Session indicated the determination of all nations to promote the human rights of girls including the right to live free from harmful practices and sexual exploitation.

“I am please”, said the DSRSG, “to note further that the Statute of the International Criminal Court has been established with jurisdictional power to try crimes of sexual violence as crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed at any civilian population”.

Prime Minister Alkatiri said that the legislation the workshop will be considering over the next three days “should act as a deterrent”, but should be coupled with a concerted and co-operative program of awareness. “The whole community has a role to play”, he said, “including local authorities and priests.”



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The need to address Domestic Violence in Timor-Leste stemmed from the First Congress of Women of East Timor held in June 2000.

SIXTEEN DAY CAMPAIGN AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

From 25 November until 10 December, a 16-day campaign will focus on educating people about and putting an end to Gender Violence in Timor-Leste. The rallying call of the national campaign is that “Gender Based Violence is not part of East Timorese culture”.

“The “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign” is being organised by Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri’s Office for Promotion of Equality (OPE) and being supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Timor Leste joins 90 other nations around the world in what has been an annual global campaign since 1991.

The starting date of the campaign, 25 November, is “International Day Against Violence Against Women”. The concluding day, 10 December, is “International Human Rights Day.” The inclusion of both dates in the campaign symbolically reinforces the message that any violence against women is a basic human rights violation.

Other significant dates fall within the 16-day campaign period, including 1 December, which is World AIDS Day, and 6 December, which marks the anniversary of the 1989 Montreal Massacre. (Fourteen women were killed and 13 others, including nine women and four men, injured in that mass shooting incident by a man who went on a tirade against feminists).

On 25 November, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri will formally launch the campaign against gender violence at an event at the University of Timor-Leste in Dili.

Numerous other events are scheduled for throughout Timor-Leste during the 16-day campaign.



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