

## By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

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### EAST TIMOR DEFENCE FORCE ASSUMES LAUTEM RESPONSIBILITY

The first battalion of East Timor's Defence Force (FALINTIL-FDTL) today assumed responsibility from UNMISSET's peacekeeping force for the country's easternmost district of Lautem, the first such handover since the UN came to East Timor in 1999.

More than 500 people turned out at the battalion's base in Lospalos town for a ceremony that included the lowering of the UN flag and the raising of East Timor's national flag to symbolize the transfer of power.

FALINTIL-FDTL Commander Taur Matan Ruak termed the handover "an historic moment" and said the defence force now needed to win and consolidate the support of East Timor's people.

SRSB Kamallesh Sharma delivered a speech in Tetum in which he said the handover of responsibility would allow East Timor's government to focus on areas other than external security.

"The nation will now be able to devote itself whole-heartedly to the task of meeting the developmental and social aspirations of its citizens, confident in the security provided by its own forces," the SRSB said.

"The men and women standing before me today will go a long way to ensuring that fear never returns to this country," the SRSB added.

East Timor President Xanana Gusmao then gave a speech in which he said he expects the first FALINTIL-FDTL Battalion – which is made up entirely of former FALINTIL freedom fighters – to be a model for other battalions in the future.

"As a former FALINTIL commander, I urge you to draw from our experience in sustaining an extremely difficult war of resistance, to transfer this experience into absolute commitment to build our nation and to nurture peace and development for all."

After the exchange of flags, the 96-member Thai company that has been based in the area since January – when the Republic of Korea battalion was re-deployed Oecussi district – conducted a ceremonial march followed by a Thai kickboxing display.

The FALINTIL-FDTL Battalion then also carried out a drill display, which was followed by a mock military maneuver.

After this morning's ceremony the SRSB returned to Dili and then flew on to Jakarta, Indonesia, for his first overseas visit during which he is scheduled to meet with diplomats and senior Indonesian government officials.

