

By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

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JAPANESE ENGINEERS HELP OEBAHA VILLAGERS REBUILD THEIR IRRIGATION CANAL

On 28 November, the Oebaha Irrigation Canal, which was rebuilt with the assistance of the 3rd Company of the 2nd Japanese Engineering Group (JEG), was inaugurated in Oebaha Village, Cova Lima District. JEG is UNMISSET's Peacekeeping Battalion that is responsible for heavy equipment road and bridge repair and other civil engineering projects in Timor-Leste.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by the UNMISSET Peacekeeping Force Commander Maj. Gen. Huck Gim Tan, government and UN officials and community residents. They had much to celebrate. With refurbishing of the irrigation canal farmers in the area will be guaranteed a dependable supply of water for their crops putting them on the road to food self-sufficiency.

Since 2000, water flow in the canal had been radically reduced. That year, particularly heavy flooding in Cova Lima shifted the course of the Mota Belulic River and caused heavy damage to the canal, clogging it with dirt and sand. Agricultural productivity in the area, which is principally rice growing, soon plummeted some 50 percent because a lack of irrigation water previously provided via the canal diminished the growing seasons. Recently, the situation became even more critical with equipment to retain watershed upstream in the mountains being inoperative and Cova Lima experiencing a sustained drought. Water flow dropped to zero.

Given the crisis, Cova Lima residents in the area asked for help. That's when the JEG stepped in. Working with local residents, the 3rd Company of the 2nd Japanese Engineering Group, about 50 troops in all, spent several weeks doing watershed management repairs upstream, rebuilding and cleaning the sluices and repairing the mechanisms to course water



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from the canal onto the farmland. The engineers moved more than 20,000 cubic meters of soil, and constructed some 80 meters of “gabion baskets” which form retaining walls to channel water flow. Three JEG bulldozers and one hydraulic excavator were used in the reconstruction process.

The Administrator of Zumalai Subdistrict (in which Oebaha Village resides), Firminio M.P. Ferreira, thanked the Peacekeeping Forces and particularly the JEG for their assistance. “Agriculture is key to our reconstruction efforts,” he said. “The irrigation canals, built and repaired by the JEG, will help us increase productivity and make the people of Oebaha self-sufficient.”

Force Commander Maj. Gen. Huck Gim Tan praised the contribution of the Japanese engineers and cited the high quality of the JEG work in constructing a rock ramp across the Mota Belulic River to divert water into the canal and the cleaning and repairing of the canal itself.

The Force Commander also thanked Cova Lima leaders and the local population for their efforts. “You have contributed over 300 man-days to the successful restoration of this canal”, he said. “You have contributed to your own future success!”

Though the JEG started reconstruction in drought conditions, they finished the task in rain. “The rainy season started just as we were completing our construction work”, the Commander of the JEG, Col. Yoshihiko Otsubo, said. “Since then, water has been flowing in the canal. It’s just proof of the splendid achievement here”. He added, “To everyone of the 3rd Company, let me express my gratitude. You have done a very good job”. Colonel Otsubo also thanked the local citizens who worked alongside the engineers, as well as the many other residents who cheered the soldiers on.

End



MEDIA BRIEFING NOTE

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