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Statement by H.E. Mr. Luis Freitas Lobato
Vice-Minister of Health

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Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is an honor for the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste to address the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

When the Beijing Platform For Action was established in 1995, Timor-Leste was not yet an independent nation, however we have greatly benefited from the recommendations outlined in this, and in other international declarations and Human Rights treaties, in the creation of our nation's policies and institutions.

Primarily, our constitution was drafted to guarantee that equality shall exist between men and women. In order to fulfill this guarantee, the Office of the Advisor to the Prime Minister for the Promotion of Equality was established with four core program areas including Gender Mainstreaming, the Promotion of a Culture of Equality, Addressing Gender Based Violence and the Empowerment of Women.

Gender Mainstreaming has been the main priority and The Office for Promotion of Equality has established Gender Focal Points in the planning departments of each Ministry which has been a strong and sustainable mechanism for promoting equality through each Ministry's work plans and budgets. This strategy has so far born some very tangible results. Our first National Development Plan, for example, includes targets and indicators for the achievement of gender equality within each Ministry's over-all strategy and Annual Action Plans. I would like to add that the Millennium Development Goals, and their inherent gender concerns, have also been mainstreamed throughout our National Development Plan.

Timor Leste has ratified seven International Human Rights Treaties, in fact just six months after achieving full independence, The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and its optional protocol, was signed and ratified.

The Office for Promotion of Equality, has been overseeing its implementation, and initiatives have included nationwide education and awareness-raising of gender equality principles and the law and at all levels. In fact, in 2005, Timor-Leste will complete its first report to the Committee of CEDAW, and through this process we will be able to review our progress so far, which will intrinsically also include review of progress towards achievement of the Beijing Platform For Action.

Timor-Leste calls attention to violence as one of the greatest obstacles to the achievement of the advancement of women. As a new nation we have had to face up to the fact that violence against women is not just an element of our difficult past, but is a highly prevalent force which continues today, and is based on strong traditional practices and beliefs which serve to sub-ordinate women, and have made Domestic Violence the single most common grievance brought to our Law-enforcement agencies today. Domestic Violence is impeding women's full participation in the economic, social and political life which we are endeavoring to develop. In response, Timor-Leste has drafted its own Domestic Violence Law which will deal directly with the needs of victims of violence, and outlines responses and responsibilities for the state and its partners. The Office for Promotion of Equality has worked very closely with civil society and the church, and consulted with the populace at all levels, to inform the development of this law, and to put in place multi-sector projects and services to assist victims of this

violence. Once the law is approved we will also have the legal mechanism to both prevent and tackle this destructive phenomenon.

Timor-Leste is also experiencing extremely high maternal mortality and fertility rates – one of the highest currently in the world. The eradication of poverty in our country is our primary goal, which is of course directly linked to our ability to improve women's reproductive health and the overall health of our families. Timor-Leste has already established effective Family Planning and Reproductive Health policies in line with the goals and targets set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the principles enunciated at the International Conference on Population and Development and significantly those recommendations set out in the Beijing Platform For Action. Timor-Leste has undertaken these commitments not only in light of the international standards which we subscribe to, but also following consultation with national partners and particularly the Church.

In Timor-Leste we now have a total 27% of women in our national Parliament, and have taken affirmative action to guarantee that at least two members of the local councils that are currently being elected nationwide must be women. We are undertaking wide education and training programs to promote the change in attitude that is needed to confirm a status for women equal with that of men in our society, and recognize this as a responsibility of both men and women.

While there is significant progress, we still face the challenge that these concepts of gender equality and women's rights are new and difficult to implement. The Office for Promotion of Equality continues to undertake extensive training and awareness-raising activities so that the desired results may be realized, but we are still a long way from achieving our overall goals.

As a nation that based its struggle for self-determination on core human rights principles, I feel that it is fitting for our delegation to take this opportunity to firmly reinforce our commitment to the practical realization of women's rights and gender equality.

My delegation therefore strongly reaffirms the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and in doing so, the Timor-Leste delegation acknowledges and encourages the consideration of factors contributing to gender equality and the Beijing Platform for Action in the up-coming review of the Millennium Development Goals scheduled for September 2005.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the UN system, particularly UNIMISSET, UNFPA, UNDP, UNIFEM, UNICEF and others, and the International Community at large, for their assistance in our development and gender programming priorities; and we encourage the Governments and NGO's represented here to continue to support each other, so that we can all succeed in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

Thank you.