



Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste  
to the United Nations in New York

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Dionisio Babo Soares  
Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste  
to the United Nations

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*Check against delivery*

**Mr. President,**

Thank you for giving me the floor,

Thirty years ago in Cairo, Egypt, 179 governments adopted the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development which puts people's rights at the heart of development. It emphasizes comprehensive reproductive health care, including voluntary family planning, safe pregnancy and childbirth services, and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

Globally, during these thirty years, there has been a growing understanding of the importance and significance of people-centered sustainable development. Indeed, there is a strong linkage between population, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. Many progresses have been gained in enhancing access to quality of education, reproductive health services, empowering women and girls, advancing gender equality, poverty reduction and economic opportunity for all.

**Mr. President,**

Timor-Leste is a small island nation with a total population of 1.34 million in 2022 and has also one of the youngest populations in Asia and the world: 44% of the total population is under 18 years old and 59% is below the age of 25. The 10–24-year-old age group accounts for one third of the population. This data entails opportunities and challenges at the same time.

Young people can be a positive force for development when provided with the knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive. In particular, they should acquire the education and skills needed to contribute to a productive economy, and they need access to a job market that can absorb them into its labor force. The greatest challenge is how to scale

up our efforts to assure universal high-quality education and health, productive employment, and decent work for all.

The youth unemployment rate in Timor-Leste was 43.3% for those aged 25 to 39 in 2020. According to the 2021 Labor Force Participation Survey, Timor-Leste's labor force participation rate is merely 30.5%, compared to 66.1% in Southeast Asia.

Timor-Leste's youth face complex hurdles, but with strategic policies and investments, their potential can be harnessed to drive economic growth and innovation. By empowering the youth, Timor-Leste can unlock its demographic dividend and create a brighter future for all.

**Mr. President,**

Regardless of these challenges, Timor-Leste has achieved important improvements in population development, such as:

1. 50% reduction in infant mortality from 83 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 43.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2021.
2. Life expectancy at birth increased about 10 years from 2000 to 2023, reaching 69.6 years.
3. Decline of total fertility rate from 5.7% in 2010 to 4.0% in 2023 and it is projected to decrease to 2% in 2050.
4. Contraceptive prevalence rate increased from 22% to 26%.
5. Unmet need for family planning decreased from 32% to 25%.
6. Infrastructural development has facilitated access to schools, health services, transportation, and improved trade within and outside the country.
7. 96% of the population have access to electricity.

These achievements, particularly in the health sector, happened as a result of international support and multi-sectoral national policies to promote quality healthcare and reduce disparities in the health status of the Timorese people.

Despite the achievements made, we are cognizant that there are still many challenges ahead. Although above 30% of the Parliamentarians are women, violence against women still persists which limits women's full participation in the development of the country. We continue to have one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the region and in the world. Furthermore, there is inadequate investment in young people, particularly in the areas of education, health, and providing economic opportunities—all of which have important implications for the economy.

**Mr. President,**

Whatever be the challenges laid before us, we have to turn them into advantages and move forward. We have to renew our commitment to the full implementation of the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

Timor-Leste reaffirms its commitment with the following policies:

1. To remove all existing barriers towards youth development, including universal access to sexual and reproductive health services for all, and adoption of legislation that targets adolescents and young people.
2. To improve the quality of education and equip young people with necessary skills and knowledge to become agents of change, so that they contribute to a sustainable and prosperous future for all.
3. To ensure that the national laws against gender-based violence provide greater protection and ensure the safety and dignity of all women, people with disabilities, and marginalized groups.

4. To allocate sufficient budget resources for the development of the productive sector, climate change mitigation, and development of the education sector.
5. To improve and enforce policies and partnerships, particularly by promoting the private sector to accelerate economic development and growth.
6. To accelerate the decentralization process and enable economic opportunities in the rural areas.

**Mr. President,**

We are convinced that only a strong international cooperation based on solidarity can help us secure the well-being and prosperity of each individual. We strongly believe in the power of working together to face the common challenges of today and tomorrow. Engaging in cooperative efforts and sharing technical expertise and knowledge are crucial to advance the full implementation of the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

I thank you, Mr. President.