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**FOURTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF
COLONIALISM**

**Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth International
Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: pathways to a sustainable future –
advancing socioeconomic and cultural development of the Non-Self-
Governing Territories**

Dili, Timor-Leste

21 to 23 May 2025

STATEMENT BY

His Excellency Dr. J. Ramos-Horta

President of Timor-Leste

Opening Remarks by

His Excellency the President of Timor-Leste, Dr. J. Ramos-Horta

On the occasion of the

Opening Ceremony of the Regional Seminar on Decolonization

Theme: "Pathways to a sustainable future, advancing socioeconomic and cultural development of the Non-Self-Governing Territories"

21 May 2025, at 10:00 AM

Palm Springs Hotel, Dili, Timor-Leste

His Excellency, the Prime Minister;

His Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation;

Delegates and esteemed members of Committee on Decolonization – C24

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome all participants to this **Regional Seminar on Decolonization**, co-organized by the Government of Timor-Leste and the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization (C24). This timely gathering takes place as we celebrate the **23rd Anniversary of the Restoration of the Independence of Timor-Leste**, commemorated across our nation on 20 May 2025. It is indeed an honour for Timor-Leste to host the 2025 Pacific Regional meeting.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude, in particular, to the Vice Minister for Multilateral Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, whose presence honours this event, as well as to all guests and participants who have travelled across continents to join us here in Dili.

This seminar, held under the theme ***"Pathways to a Sustainable Future: Advancing Socioeconomic and Cultural Development of the Non-Self-Governing Territories"***, aims to take stock of the progress, efforts, challenges,

and achievements of Member States in implementing the **Action Plan of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism**.

It also aims to present diverse perspectives, best strategies, and concrete recommendations to accelerate the process of decolonization, including for non-territorial and self-governing states.

The Historical Legacy of Timor-Leste and the Moral Legitimacy of Its Voice in the C24

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste is, in itself, a living testimony to the prolonged and resilient struggle of a people for their right to self-determination.

Recognized as a Non-Self-Governing Territory by the United Nations in the 1960s, still under Portuguese colonial rule, Timor-Leste achieved its international recognition in 2002, with the restoration of independence in 20 May, securing political freedom through a process sustained by international solidarity, the legitimacy of international law, and the tireless work of the United Nations — including the fundamental role of the Special Committee on Decolonization. It was a finest moment of the UN system and international cooperation and solidarity.

But our freedom is also owed to the **Indonesian people**, to the **students**, and even to the **Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI – Tentara Nasional Indonesia)**, who accepted the holding of the Popular Consultation.

They also accepted the result and allowed the path toward the **Restoration of Independence** that we celebrated yesterday — in the presence of two distinguished representatives of the TNI: **General Agus Subiyanto** and **Brigadier General João Xavier Barreto Nunes** — to whom we extended our warmest welcome.

Let us not be mistaken: given the historical context of that time, the Indonesian Army had **not been defeated**. It remained intact — the only stable power and essential pillar of the unity of the Republic of Indonesia. A vital force to hold together the thousands of islands and cultures that make up that vast archipelagic state.

If this powerful army had refused to allow the Popular Consultation, or rejected its results, or if it had not supported the Reformasi Movement, we would have remained fighters and heroes — but we would not be free or independent.

It was a timely decision by President B.J. Habibie — a lucid, visionary, and courageous man — to grant the Timorese people the opportunity to choose their destiny by organizing the Popular Consultation of 30 August 1999.

Our legitimacy in this matter is also enshrined in Article 8(1) of the Constitution, which states that the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste conducts its international relations based on principles such as:

- The right of peoples to self-determination and independence;
- The permanent sovereignty of peoples over their natural wealth and resources;
- Mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and equality among States; and
- Non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

Let me briefly touch upon my personal relationship with the C24:

I vividly recall the year 1975, when, as the representative of the Diplomatic Front of the Timorese National Liberation Struggle, I had the opportunity and the duty to contact for the first time the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization — the C24.

It was at the forum of the C24 and the UN Security Council that I raised the voice of our cause, appealing to the international community to recognize our right and support the restoration of our freedom.

That experience was, for me and for Timor-Leste, a powerful testimony to the critical role that the C24 plays in the struggle for decolonization and sustainable development.

The Committee is not merely a political advocacy instrument, but a space to strengthen cooperation among administering powers, peoples, and all relevant actors.

I am confident that, together, we will find ways to uphold the dignity, sovereignty, and potential of all peoples still undergoing decolonization.

On the Commitment to Non-Self-Governing Territories

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste firmly believes that the decolonization process remains incomplete as long as there are peoples whose free and genuine will has not been heard, respected, and implemented.

The defence of these principles is not only a historical duty but also a vital contribution to building a more just, inclusive, and respectful international system — one that honours the dignity of all peoples.

Excellencies, Esteemed delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this moment when the world seeks answers to global challenges of peace, justice, and sustainable development, we cannot ignore the situations in which the right to self-determination remains incomplete or contested.

Timor-Leste firmly believes that all Non-Self-Governing Territories under consideration by the C24 must be given the opportunity to freely decide their future — choosing their own political, economic, and social systems in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Timor-Leste further reaffirms its commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, constructive dialogue, and the principles of non-violence and reconciliation.

We believe that only through these paths can we build fair, sustainable, and truly inclusive solutions for all peoples who aspire to freedom and self-determination.

Concrete Pathways to a Sustainable Future

As we reflect on the paths toward a truly sustainable future in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, we reaffirm the centrality of the right to self-determination, but also the urgency of translating this principle into real progress — social, economic, and cultural — for the peoples of these territories.

International solidarity must be transformed into tangible commitments, into investments in education, health, institutional capacity-building, and the empowerment of local communities. The decolonization agenda, far from being a legacy of the past, remains an ethical and political priority of the present — and must be an active tool for positive transformation.

Timor-Leste will continue, with humility and determination, to contribute to this collective effort, sharing its experience, defending the principles of the United Nations Charter, and promoting a more just, inclusive, and supportive world.

The role of the Special Committee on Decolonization (C24) remains essential.

The C24 is not only a guardian of the principle of self-determination; it is also a catalyst that should facilitate bridges between administering powers, the peoples of the territories, and multiple stakeholders — including UN agencies, international financial institutions, universities, civil society, and the private sector.

The Committee can enhance its role by promoting practical platforms for dialogue, mapping economic opportunities, and coordinating multilateral technical assistance. Its mission is both political and operational.

With regard to the administering powers, we encourage a partnership approach based on active listening.

It is expected that these powers not only fulfil their legal obligations, but also adopt a proactive, cooperative, and transparent stance in supporting the sustainable development of the territories under their responsibility.

This includes strengthening education, healthcare, infrastructure, and the social and cultural inclusion of local communities, with full respect for their identities and aspirations.

The United Nations, as a universal multilateral platform, has a decisive role to play.

The UN must enhance the coherence of its actions in relation to the Non-Self-Governing Territories, better articulating the mandates of the C24 with the resources, capacities, and networks of specialized agencies such as UNDP, UNESCO, FAO, ILO, and others.

There is a need to integrate these territories into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with concrete monitoring indicators and financing mechanisms.

Finally, our most urgent recommendation is the adoption of practical, measurable, and accessible actions, with visible results in the short and medium term.

These may include:

- Pilot technical training programs with youth from the territories;

- Community development plans supported by international partnerships;
- Joint missions of the C24 with UN agencies for needs assessment;
- And the establishment of a Support Fund for the Sustainable Development of Non-Self-Governing Territories, coordinated by the UN and in close collaboration with the beneficiary peoples themselves.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

Decolonization today is not achieved solely through resolutions — it is achieved through dignity, inclusion, and impact.

The experience of Timor-Leste demonstrates that lasting peace is born from respect for the will of the people and is consolidated on the ground through social justice, economic opportunity, and cultural freedom.

Timor-Leste, is a young, imperfect, vibrant democracy, an oasis of peace, tolerance and freedom, a shining light of democracy and tranquillity in this turbulent world.

We are a multicultural, multi-religious, multilingual and multi-ethnic society. We are committed to our diversity and political plurality, open to the world, tolerant, free of hatred.

We have zero political violence, zero ethnic based or religious based tensions or crime. We do not have domestic organized crime, no armed robbery, no organized crime, no hard drug users and drug trafficking.

Timor-Leste today is an oasis of tranquillity and is advancing confidently toward regional integration, with full membership in ASEAN expected, possibly even within this year.

We will continue to stand with the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, with humility, solidarity, and conviction.

In this light, I am honoured to officially open the 2025 Pacific Regional Seminar of the UN Special Committee on Decolonization. I wish you all a very fruitful, innovative and creative deliberations.

Thank you very much and May God bless us all.