



PRESIDÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA

Speech

By

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Excellency President of General Assembly,
Excellency Secretary-general
Your Majesties,
Your Excellencies Presidents and Prime Ministers,
Ministers, High Envoys, Ambassadors,
USGs and ASGs.

I. TIMOR-LESTE, A VIBRANT DEMOCRACY

We are a young, imperfect, vibrant democracy, an oasis of peace, tolerance and freedom, a shining light of democracy.

From independence in 2002, our democracy has evolved, alive and lively. We have held very competitive five (5) presidential elections and six (6) parliamentary elections, always in a timely, orderly and free atmosphere.

The 21st May 2023 parliamentary elections were recognized by all sectors of our society and international observers as free and fair, paving the way for a smooth transfer of power to the IX Constitutional Government on 1st July 2023 led by the Prime Minister, Mr. Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão.

The Economist magazine's "Democracy Index" ranks Timor-Leste the most democratic country in Southeast Asia; Reporters Without Borders in its latest "World Press Freedom Index" ranks Timor-Leste's number 10 globally in media freedom.

We are a multicultural, multi-religious, multilingual and multi-ethnic society. With humility we continue to build a country that is open to the world, tolerant,

free of hatred and violence. Our 98% practicing Catholics live in harmony with our Protestant and Muslim brothers and sisters. Timor-Leste has zero political violence, zero ethnic based or religious based tensions and exclusion. We do not have domestic organized crime or armed robbery.

Despite a significant decrease in poverty, multidimensional poverty is still high at 45.8%. Lifting our people out of extreme poverty, food insecurity, stunt, child malnutrition, caring for mothers, are among the challenges we are determined to confront head on in the next five years.

In the 20 years since independence, Timor-Leste's economic and social indicators show progress, namely, in life expectancy, (less than 60 years in 2002, 70 now), reduction in poverty and infant mortality, 21 doctors in 2002, more than 1,200 in 2022.

This is due almost entirely to Cuban solidarity, although our own Government has contributed and continues to contribute a significant share of the cost of the ongoing health cooperation programs.

In 2002 our capital city had only intermittent power, a luxury not available in the rest of the country. Now 96.1 % of the country has electric power and solar panels are widely used in remote poor homes. Mobile connectivity reaches most of the country and the internet is widely available. This will improve significantly in the next 2-3 years with a submarine cable and fiber optic links.

Progress has been made in promoting women's leadership at the national level in recent years. 34% of the seats in the National Parliament are held by women. This is above the regional average (19%) and the global average (26%). In the Presidency, all three top positions, Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff and National Director Of Administration are held by women.

We have an unacceptable high incidence of domestic violence. UN Woman nevertheless acknowledges that Timor-Leste is making significant strides in implementing international legal frameworks and policies, including Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, in advancing gender equality and empowerment of girls and women in education, social and political.

In 2022 we launched the National Action Plan on Ending Gender-Based Violence in the next decade. The Government is partnering with civil society organizations and UN Women in developing the second National Action Plan to implement the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.

Legislations promoting advancement of gender equality have been passed. These include the Law on Establishing the Social Security Contribution Scheme, and the Law Establishing the Special Regime for Definition of Ownership of Immovable Property (Land Law) and the Suco Law. The Suco Law protects the equal rights of women and men to participate in leadership positions at the Suco (Village) level, which specifically requires that there should be at least one woman per Suco standing for the elections as Suco Chief.

Working with development partners, UN Women and UNICEF, we promote women and children-centered development models, recognizing the indispensable role of women in shaping our future. Our initiatives include providing support to women weavers and women entrepreneurs through skills training, network building and strengthening production and supply chains. With our long-standing development partners, including the UN, we are strengthening human capacities across sectors, to both prepare for our

accession to ASEAN, and to further promote the cause of gender equality and human rights in Timor-Leste and the region.

II. ASEAN, CPLP, G7+, WTO

Our regional organization ASEAN faces extreme challenges, namely the multidimensional Myanmar catastrophe. However, we are all very proud of the achievements of the organization since its inception in 1967 at the height of the Cold War. Today with a combined population of almost 700 million people and US\$4 Trillion joint GDP, ASEAN is one of the world's most preeminent regional organizations.

At the 40th and 41st Summits held in Phnom Penh Summit in November 2022 Timor-Leste was granted Observer State status in ASEAN, with the right to participate in all Summits of Heads of State and Government, Ministerial, senior officials, and technical level meetings.

We are very grateful for the ASEAN leaders' unanimous decision to grant Timor-Leste Observer Status. We are very grateful to Cambodia, in particular to Prime Minister Hun Sen, as ASEAN Chairman in 2022, who so actively championed our ASEAN membership, a national strategic cause for our entire nation.

We are equally very grateful to President Joko Widodo, as ASEAN Chairman in 2023, for his serene leadership of the organization.

Indonesia, a very generous bilateral partner, is engaged in Timor-Leste development in many areas, including in agriculture, education, and health sectors. 300 full scholarships are awarded to Timorese students to study in the best Universities in Indonesia. 40 Timorese officials are undergoing

enhanced capacity building programs as part of our ASEAN accession preparedness.

We are grateful to all ASEAN leaders for the unanimous endorsement of Timor-Leste membership, the comprehensive Road Map and the support package on capacity building of our officials. Singapore has launched a generous comprehensive capacity building program for up to 800 officials.

We are indebted to the tireless ASEAN Secretariat for their ongoing daily guidance and mentoring.

In return we do not have much to offer ASEAN except our long years of experience in sailing through stormy seas that might be of some value in lessons in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. We will not be a financial burden nor a diplomatic embarrassment. Military coups are alien in our political culture.

We finance our own National Budget from the returns of a Sovereign Fund invested in US Treasury Bonds, other developed markets bonds, and in global financial markets. Average return of the Petroleum Fund as of June 2023 for Equity is 9.7%.

We are minimally exposed in terms of official debt. Timor-Leste's loan to GDP ratio is 16%, among lowest in the world. Total loan since 2012 is \$1.02 billion, total disbursement is \$289.3 million. We borrowed from ADB, World Bank, JICA, and Australia. The average interest rate is 2%, below the average return of the Petroleum Fund. Our GDP for 2021 is \$1.5 billion (actual).

Negotiations for WTO accession are in final stages and we look forward to membership in 2024. We are very grateful to WTO DG Prof. NGOZI OKONJO-IWEALA and her team for their tireless mentoring and guidance. Portuguese WTO Ambassador Rui Macieira deserves a special note of gratitude from Timor-Leste for his exceptional guidance.

Timor-Leste is an active member of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries - **CPLP** - comprising Angola, Brasil, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe. Timor-Leste is actively engaged with the group as a substantial financial contributor while actively building bilateral cooperation between CPLP fraternal members.

Timor-Leste is a co-founder of the international group g7+, established in 2010 in Dili, the first ever self-organized Inter-Governmental organization comprising 20 conflict affected countries, including Somalia, Haiti, Yemen, Afghanistan, South Sudan, CAR (Central African Republic), DRC and others. It is currently chaired by Sierra Leone, represented by the Minister of Planning and Economic Development.

Global crises including pandemics and climate change have disproportionately impacted, and are increasingly concentrated in, the already fragile and conflict-affected countries of the global South, such as g7+ members. Wars, of which some were started and perpetuated by outside interests using these nations as proxy battlegrounds for their own interests, have increased the burdens of hunger, poverty and humanitarian crises, which in turn will exacerbate further conflict.

It would be a sensible investment by the international community to invest in the goals of the g7+ nations and its efforts to increase development, stability, and resilience to this crucial sector.

III - UN SECURITY COUNCIL, MYANMAR, UKRAINE, AND THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

Majesties,
Excellencies,

Armed conflicts proliferate, economic and social conditions are worsening across the world, and forgotten are the children of the tragedies of Myanmar, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Palestine, DRC, to mention but a few cases.

The elusive Security Council Reform

The multilateral security architecture built over decades is obsolete. On and off we hear about UN Security Council reform, troves of dissertations are produced on the subject.

Academics concoct an expanded Security Council, regurgitate ideas for a more representative body reflecting today's demographics. But we should not entertain illusions that an expanded UNSC in itself would transform world governance.

Leaders of global powers have not ended the nuclear arms race, have profited from weapons exports, have led in the desecration of Mother Nature, have failed to rescue the poorest out of poverty, have not shown wisdom in writing off the debt burdens caused by loan sharks from Western commercial banks.

Myanmar and North Korea

Myanmar and North Korea are the two most glaring examples of anachronisms, in an era of advances in science and technology and of liberty, political and intellectual freedoms.

In Myanmar, the military pursue a scorched earth strategy with widespread use of aircraft and helicopters targeting civilians across the country.

Since the violent 2021 assault on Myanmar democracy Spring, at least 3,000 civilians have been killed and 17,000 people arbitrarily imprisoned, including legitimately elected leaders such as Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung Suu Kyi. The people of Myanmar feel betrayed by the international community, some of whom quite conveniently pay lip service to the principle of ASEAN centrality while aiding and abetting the rogue military regime with weapons and commercial ventures that directly fund the junta.

More than 1 million Rohingya, rightful citizens of Myanmar, arbitrarily stripped of their citizenship, are languishing in camps in Bangladesh since 2017. In spite of the laudable commitment by the international community and UN Agencies, the Government and people of Bangladesh continue to carry an excessive weight on their shoulders. Other regional countries, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, host endless streams of refugees seeking safety.

North Korea

The growing tensions between global powers are eroding the potential of our collective security institutions, weakening us further at a time when we face existential challenges.

North Korea continues to pose the gravest threat to the Republic of Korea and Japan and to the region as a whole.

Talks of denuclearization of North Korea are fanciful illusions and rising tensions between the US and China are detrimental to efforts to mitigate threats to peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula.

We understand the extreme complexity of some world's conflicts, and for this very reason we earnestly hope that the two global powers improve communications, reset bilateral relationships, and seek common ground on North Korea and Myanmar.

Ukraine

Timor-Leste condemns the invasion, violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and the ongoing war with its catastrophic consequences for Ukrainian people, for Russians and for the rest of the world with the disruption of global trade in essential commodities.

Very seldom wars are resolved in the battlefield. When leaders underestimate their adversaries, overestimate their own capabilities, and when egos prevail over hard thinking, when principles are not part of the equation, the war inevitably goes on, and as the body count and costs mount, de-escalation becomes more difficult. So the war may continue for years, random killings and destruction continue until all sides are exhausted, and only then, the warring parties may begin to explore ideas for ending the war, reach a peace settlement, one that may be secured only if all the sides involved summon courage to compromise.

Palestine, Cuba, Western Sahara

We cannot accept the incomprehensible anachronisms and Cold War legacies such as the comprehensive embargo imposed on the Cuban people.

The blatant disregard of UNGA and SC resolutions by Israel, reneging the two-state solution for Palestine, poses a serious credibility challenge to the UNSC and perpetuates a profound injustice.

The continuing impasse on the realization of the internationally recognized rights to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara must be addressed as the impasse risks an escalation of tensions and conflict.

IV. SAVING OUR PLANET

Majesties, Presidents, Excellencies,

Our common home, Planet Earth, has been wrecked over centuries by its worst predators, we humans. And it is in such existential challenging times that we realize how we are lacking inspiring global leaders capable of summoning leaders and citizens to rescue the planet.

We are not paying enough attention to the impact that rising temperatures have in heightening conflict and violence, particularly in fragile and vulnerable states. People living in fragile circumstances already feel the effects of climate change most severely.

We need a new outlook on the climate and security nexus, which will address the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on peace, security and ensure that the quest for energy transition does not worsen the security situation in fragile countries.

We are proposing a bold initiative in this area, one that seeks to accelerate a just energy transition in fragile developing states that heavily rely on oil and gas production to prevent turmoil and unrest.

The combined efforts of unlocking finance through debt alleviation, streamlining international finance at lowest interest rates, and significantly increasing official development assistance, will empower these nations to embark on projects that both foster the development of clean industries and address the ongoing loss and damage related to climate change, facilitating both their efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas and adapt to climate change.

While initiatives to further the just transition exist, they do not pay enough attention to fragile or vulnerable states, LDCs and SIDS.

As a second priority, this initiative will pay urgent attention to the particular challenges faced by fragile states that are not only susceptible to fragility and vulnerability on their own, but face heightened risk when faced with massive economic turmoil, which the green transition - if not handled carefully - could increase.

Thirdly, as the urgency to transition to a low-carbon economy and clean energy accelerate, this initiative will seek to ensure that the quest for rare earth elements and critical minerals does not lead to further instability nor promote weak governance or exacerbate local tensions nor grievances in the countries where strategic reserves of such elements and minerals are found. This initiative seeks to create a more sustainable future for our planet and all its inhabitants. By facilitating the energy transition in small island development states, LDCs and climate vulnerable nations, we aim to mitigate climate change impacts and preserve our shared global environment for generations to come.

We continue to be witnesses to the super-rich CEOs of banks and creditor countries, who, even when facing the agony of poverty and the rising cost of

living in the most impoverished countries, remain defiant to international calls for debt cancellation.

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has been in decline since the 2007 subprime crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war against Ukraine. Some official OECD data show a significant increase in ODA but this substantial increase is due to the dramatic surge in humanitarian and other support packages for Ukrainian refugees.

It would be a leap forward in international solidarity if OECD countries allocate 1% of national GDP and fast track disbursement directly to national governments. We would see positive effects on poverty rates, food security, access to basic health services, education, electricity, drinking water, sanitation, housing and social security, with multiplier effects on the diversification of economies, especially in agriculture.

In this digital age, in the emergence of high-capacity Artificial Intelligence, millions of human beings, in particular women and children, continue to languish in conditions of extreme poverty and in deprivation of basic freedoms.

But we cannot expect the OECD countries, Gulf Cooperation Council, China, India to shoulder the burden of international solidarity. The billionaires of the affluent North and the billionaires of the affluent South should converge around a Global Fund for Education and Health, and an Energy Transition Regime, sharing innovations, taking advantage of the new global communication networks and spaces, following the good example set by COVAX in the distribution of vaccines during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

We live in a universe full of dualities: an increasingly prosperous World, whose wealth has increased by US\$30 trillion a year, according to Nobel Prize winner

Kailash Satyarthi, and the failure of the leaderships of the G7 and G20 to reflect this increase in the fight against hunger, stunting and the painful misery of child labor and child slavery.

We need to adopt a universal child benefit, a new ODA target for a fair share for children targeting particularly children in fragile low-income countries.

Allow me to remind you all a story that is no longer part of our daily conversation, the story of the 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, an innocent Syrian baby, whose lifeless body washed ashore near the Turkish resort town of Bodrum in September 2015.

The little boy lost his life, along with his mom, Rehana, and older brother, Galip, as they desperately attempted to flee the brutal war in the northern Syrian town of Kobani. Pictures of Aylan Kurdi's lifeless body face down in Turkish shores shocked us all.

And how many think of the children suffering and dying everyday of hunger and in the many other ongoing wars?

Majesties, Presidents, Excellencies,

We must seriously reflect on the inevitable reality that in this increasingly interconnected Global Village, a problem in a neighboring or distant country is our problem too, as it can cross borders, morph into global pandemics, natural disasters, social, humanitarian and migratory crises, food insecurity and volatile commodity prices.

In centuries past the Atlantic Ocean was the graveyard of African slaves, and those who survived the voyage built new countries with their sweat and blood.

In this XXIst Century, the Mediterranean Sea is the new graveyard of thousands of Africans, fleeing drought, extreme poverty, conflicts.

No one should fear the Chinese, Indian, European, American Superpowers, rather we should welcome the positive reality of "Global Countries" that share with us diasporas, cultures and interests in well-being or security that are deeply intertwined with our own. We can gain more from the free movement of people and goods than from building concrete walls.

Frequent talks of China as a menace are unjustified, unfair. Global China has fueled trade, economic growth and prosperity in the region surrounding China and globally. No one should desire a Chinese economic crisis, nor should we desire a weakened US economy.

We all benefit from the impressive Indian transformation into a global economic success story. India has an admirable track record of decades of practical solidarity with other developing countries even during the early stages of its own development.

Equally we want to see prosperity in the UK, France, Germany, in all EU member countries, in Japan, South Korea, Australia. But their continuing prosperity depends on peace and stability in the global South, depends on our markets, workforce and providers of raw wealth which they process and re-export. But this unequal relationship has to change. And will change when we invest more in high quality Education and Health for our children and youth, when we invest more in Science and Technology.

We have the chance of the Century to build a new partnership of equals between the super-rich of the North and us in the periphery, with a renewed

spirit of mission, around the global causes of nature and human survival.
Failing this, we will sink together, rich and poor, the weak and the powerful.

May God bless us all..

End