



**PRIME
MINISTER**

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY
THE PRIME MINISTER KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
79TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**“Leaving No One Behind: Acting Together for the Advancement of
Peace, Sustainable Development and Human Dignity for Present and
Future Generations”**

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Palácio do Governo
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

Your Excellency the President of the United Nations General Assembly

All protocol observed,

It is an honour to address this Assembly once again on behalf of Timor-Leste.

This session holds special significance for the Timorese. Last month, in Dili, with the esteemed presence of the United Nations Secretary-General, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of our historic Popular Consultation.

A quarter of a century ago, the people of Timor-Leste, under the auspices of the United Nations, exercised their vote for independence.

With the support of the international community, we were able to return the destiny of our country to its people: the destiny of living in peace, freedom, and independence, after a forgotten war in which more than 200,000 Timorese sacrificed their lives.

In 2002, when we became the 191st member of the United Nations, was a memorable day for the Timorese people and was, undoubtedly, a triumph for the international system.

Today, I stand before you with pride, representing a vibrant democracy – a democracy that has embraced peace, dialogue, human rights, and the rule of law.

Although a small country and a young state, Timor-Leste is an example of this relentless pursuit of peace and has affirmed this position on the international stage.

Immediately after our vote for independence, we began a process of internal reconciliation among Timorese and external reconciliation with our Indonesian neighbours.

Reconciliation is a powerful mechanism for healing the past and building the future. Reconciliation and trust are the instruments of peace that the world needs.

Your Excellencies

The story of Timor-Leste is a story of hope and resilience.

The creation of the United Nations was founded on hope: the hope of achieving peace in all its dimensions and in all places; promoting sustainable development; finding collective solutions to global challenges and threats; and uniting international cooperation around these goals.

However, there has never been so much hopelessness, uncertainty, instability, and distrust.

As everyone knows, global crises are numerous and complex.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are due in six years, and I must say that we are far from achieving them. Some countries have lost the race before even leaving the starting line.

Timor-Leste and the g7+ countries proposed the inclusion of SDG 16, “Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions”, in the 2030 Development Agenda because we believe that leaving no one behind means prioritising the most fragile first.

Peace and stability are priorities for achieving sustainable development. Without peace, there is no justice, no strong institutions, and no development. And without development, peace becomes fragile.

Two days ago, the g7+ held a Side Event here at the United Nations, where we discussed our successes or our setbacks... but the common problem we all faced in solving internal problems was a lack of funding.

Timor-Leste is proud to have already made some significant progress. However, we are well aware that much remains to be done.

The overlap of crises has exacerbated social and economic inequalities. Hunger is the most illustrative face of inequality. And it is women, young people, and children suffering the most from this tragedy.

In a world where global military spending exceeds \$2.4 trillion, more than 800 million people suffer from extreme hunger. Some countries report alarming levels of hunger, while others endure severe hunger in regions devastated by decades of conflict and instability.

Sustainable development and the blue economy

Timor-Leste, being a half-island, is currently focused on diversifying its economy, with particular emphasis on agriculture and the blue economy. By investing in these sectors, we aim to improve the livelihood of our people and enhance food security.

Like many other countries, Timor-Leste is grappling with climate change and unsustainable activities in the ocean. As we know, in the words of Sylvia Earle, “*We need to respect the ocean and take care of it as if our lives depend on it. Because they do*”.

Timor-Leste is located within the Coral Triangle, a magnificent area of marine biodiversity. Our seas host important ecosystems and marine life and serve as an important migratory route for species such as the incredible pygmy blue whales.

Timor-Leste is pleased to share that we have ratified the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, relating to the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity in Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), and we support and actively participate in negotiations on the Marine Plastics Treaty.

Internally, we are committed to exploring our ocean resources in a balanced and sustainable manner, ensuring that we can develop our country while simultaneously protecting our marine environment for future generations.

Your Excellencies,

We recognise that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) face enormous challenges in achieving the SDGs.

During the 4th International Conference on SIDS in Antigua and Barbuda, I saw that we shared a perception of geographical and historical disadvantage. Without financial conditions, capacity-building, and technology transfer, we cannot do better.

The impact of climate change on vulnerable nations

Moreover, we are trapped in international financial systems that place us disadvantaged, burdening us with conditional aid, financial assistance, and debt.

The “loss and damage” fund, approved at COP 28 in Dubai, must secure more significant contributions from wealthy and developed countries. This commitment is urgently needed.

As the Secretary-General, António Guterres, stated during his visit to Timor-Leste last month, many of us won the battle against colonialism and the struggle for democracy, but we are still fighting for sustainable development.

In his “New Agenda for Peace”, he also notes that the unequal suffering caused by the effects of climate change is among the greatest injustices in this world. Timor-Leste agrees!

We all know that we can only win this battle with genuine global solidarity and effort. Unconditional support based on our identified needs and priorities is required.

International conflicts and the importance of international law

It is with sadness that I stand before you in a world ravaged by international conflicts and wars. A world that, if not entirely at war, is threatened by war.

We possess the instruments of international law, diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation to resolve disputes peacefully, but these instruments are not applied consistently and are often ignored.

We call for the peaceful resolution of international disputes and conflicts, whether related to borders, sovereignty, or cooperation.

Timor-Leste will host the 24th Regional Conference of the Special Committee on Decolonization (C24) in May 2025.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Western Sahara is a country that has faced political uncertainty for almost five decades. In October 1975, the International Court of Justice held that Western Sahara was a non-self-governing territory and that it should follow the parameters and principles stated in the ‘*UN General Assembly Resolution for self-determination through the free and genuine expression of the will of the peoples of the territory*’.

More recently, rulings by the European Union Courts, as well as the decision of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, state that Western Sahara is

“separate and distinct” from Morocco, without Morocco exercising any sovereignty over the territory.

When, in 1991, the United Nations Security Council established the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, through Resolution 690, the Timorese were motivated and hopeful that one day it would be our turn too.

But in 1992, the referendum in Western Sahara was postponed.

I am now calling, after dozens of Security Council Resolutions, for their implementation leading to a referendum on self-determination for the Saharawi people.

I am pleased to see the presence of the Palestinian delegation as an observer member of the United Nations, and I hope that next year we will also have the presence of a Sahrawi delegation.

I call for an immediate ceasefire between the Polisario Front and Morocco, to pave the way for an exhaustive dialogue based on goodwill between the parties for a negotiated peaceful solution, acceptable to both sides, but which respects the will of the Saharawi people.

I call on the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, to embrace this just cause of the Sahrawi people, as Kofi Annan did for the Timorese cause.

Excellencies,

War cannot be an instrument of domination. It is a scourge that destroys lives, communities, and nations, and it must not – and indeed does not – remain confined within borders.

We must ensure that international law is respected by all, not just by some.

Timor-Leste expresses its deepest concern and full support for a peaceful solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine and calls for an immediate end to the genocide, and also calls for an end to the war in Ukraine.

I call for the principles of the “United Nations Charter” to be applied, with courage and leadership.

I call for more thought to be given to peoples and individuals, victims of global policies and leadership, entrenched status quo.

An example of this is Cuba, a friend of Timor-Leste, without which our health sector would still be in a deplorable condition. The economic, commercial, and financial embargo imposed on Cuba for decades, with its implications for its people, is unacceptable.

If the focus this year is on human dignity, let us not forget, please, the most forgotten people of the world!

The need for United Nations reform

The Security Council must become more representative, and its decisions must reflect the collective will of the international community. The voices of smaller nations should not be drowned out by the interests of the more powerful States.

The world's main peace and security body must be expanded so that it is not under-represented and must include the permanent voice of the African continent, as well as Latin America and Asia.

Timor-Leste supports comprehensive and long-term reform of the Security Council to expand both permanent and non-permanent members, as only then will we have a solid and transparent architecture for global peace.

We also believe that the General Assembly itself should have more power on security issues to prevent Member States from becoming paralysed in critical situations.

We are encouraged by the calls of the United Nations Secretary-General to eliminate nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction before they eliminate us. Timor-Leste has ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and calls on everyone to contribute to ensuring our common future, including the ratification of the Treaty by Pacific Island nations.

A call for unity and collective action

We call on all nations, especially the developed world, to join us in building a fairer, more equitable, and more sustainable future, and in doing so fulfil the vision of the Pact for the Future.

Before concluding, I must express my appreciation to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who now also holds Timorese nationality, for his efforts to transform the present towards a future of dignity for all generations.

This vision will only be possible if all UN Member States can overcome their differences and act together for the consolidation of peace and development.

Peace is a global mission, development is a global duty.

I would like to remind you that, without the United Nations, our future would be even darker. Even with all its weaknesses and need for change, the United Nations is the most promising mechanism available to us to overcome the challenges of our time. Without this body, we would truly have no way out...

With perseverance and the will to do good, no matter how inconvenient it may seem, no challenge is insurmountable!

Thank you very much.
Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão