



Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste to the United Nations

Address  
By  
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President, Timor-Leste,  
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate (1996)  
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UN General Assembly

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Check against Delivery

President of the General Assembly,  
Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen

We thank the Mayor and New Yorkers for welcoming us in their city. We sympathise with the residents of the Big Apple for the inconveniences caused by our presence even if most people would agree that the UN and the numerous meetings held here throughout the year bring enormous tangible and non quantifiable benefits to the City.

We also thank the U.S. Federal authorities for their exceptional efforts and professionalism in providing us with a secure and yet friendly environment.

We have never met Mayor Bloomberg but he has gone up in our esteem and respect for his intellectual clarity and moral courage in standing for the rights of American Muslims in building a Cultural Centre and a sacred place of worship in lower Manhattan as a venue for reflection, learning and fraternity among cultures and religions.

What better place than lower Manhattan near the World Trade Centre to signal the revulsion of American Muslims and moderate Muslims all over the world against the action of some extremists? Congratulations to Mayor Bloomberg.

I was not present in this august room when President Ahmadinejad of the Islamic Republic of Iran addressed this Assembly a few days ago. I was at Columbia University addressing an equally important gathering of young students and academics from many countries, cultures and religions. So I did not hear President Ahmadinejad's latest intellectual concoctions in this august Assembly.

I will not question the right of anyone to speak his mind. President Ahmadinejad is entitled to believe in, and regurgitate, whatever intellectual, philosophical or theological concoctions his unique mind may fabricate.

However, I do not agree that anyone of us should disregard basic rules and practices of conduct among leaders and utter obscenities in this august Assembly. What President Ahmadinejad said in this forum in regard to the terrorist attacks on World Trade Centre was an obscenity. He went too far as he has done many times before in this Assembly and in other *fora* as when he questioned the facts of the Holocaust.

Otherwise, we fully subscribe to Iran's legitimate rights to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and we caution the powers that be not to haste in reaching conclusions that may lead to irreversible catastrophic decisions. We do have serious doubts, however, about the reliability and safety of nuclear energy. Let's not forget the lessons of the Three Mile Island accident which occurred at 4AM 28<sup>th</sup> March 1979 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and the even worse Chernobyl nuclear meltdown of April 1986. The recent catastrophe of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico would pale by comparison with a blow up of a nuclear energy facility.

We don't know whether Iranian rulers do have the desire to be an armed nuclear power or not. But what we do know is that the possession of nuclear weapons is not a short cut to super-power status as some in Asia seem to think and does not insure anyone against 21<sup>st</sup> Century conventional and non –conventional security threats. Nuclear weapons were developed as a

result of the tragic experiences of World War II and of mutual suspicion and fears pervasive among the powers at the time. They have become obsolete.

The mighty Soviet nuclear and conventional arsenals were not able to prevent the implosion of the Empire and the liberation of hundreds of millions of people and the reunification of Germany. And nuclear weapons are not going to be of much help in the on-going ethnic, religious and border disputes in Asia. We pray to God the Almighty and the Merciful that these weapons and others, chemical and biological, do not have ever fall in to the hands of extremist non-state entities.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

We extend sincere sentiments of sympathy and solidarity with the peoples across the world, in particular the peoples of Haiti and Pakistan, who in the past months have endured much pain as a consequence of the havoc caused by natural calamities.

We also extend sincere sympathies to all those who are experiencing much pain, consequence of man-made calamities like the continuing sectarian violence in Somalia, D. R. Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

We gathered here from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> September to review the progress or lack of, on the pledges we solemnly made in 2000 before our peoples to eliminate or at least halve poverty by 2015.

### ***1. From ashes to hope***

We regained independence in 2002 and in the first years of our independence, we set out to rebuild our country from the ashes of the violence of the past, lay the foundations of a functioning democratic state, heal the wounds and reconcile our divided communities; and normalise relations with past external foes.

In only eight years and in spite of the overwhelming challenges facing us, we have navigated out of the storms to a new period of peace, stability and economic growth.

Timor-Leste is a Least Developed Country (LDC) affected by pervasive poverty. We are still a fragile country partly because we are only 8-years old, and being an infant country, all the institutions of the State are young and fragile. However, the Almighty and the Merciful blessed us with generous natural resources like oil and gas enabling us to accelerate our overall development.

### ***2. Meeting the MDGs: Economic growth, poverty alleviation***

Timor-Leste was not yet independent in 2000 and it wasn't until our first MDG Report in 2004 that the first targets were set.

For the past three years Timor-Leste has been enjoying real peace and

- A robust economic growth of over 12%.
- Poverty levels have decreased by as much as 9% in the last two years.
- Infant mortality and under-five mortality rates have been reduced and already reached the 2015

target.

- School enrolment has increased from 65% in 2007 to 83% in 2009/2010.
- Adult Illiteracy is being gradually eliminated thanks to a joint program between Timor-Leste and Cuba.
- We anticipate that within two to three years Timor-Leste will be completely free of illiteracy.
- About 30% of our General State Budget is allocated to Public Health and Education.

This turn-around is largely thanks to an aggressive public financing of social programs like direct cash transfers to elderly, widows, handicapped, veterans and determined efforts to expand cultivated areas and increase food production.

The first of the 800 Timorese medical students studying in Cuba have returned home. In addition to those studying medicine in Cuba, there are 200 more enrolled in Medicine in our National University.

In addition, more than 200 Cuban doctors have been assigned to Timor-Leste since 2004 working side by side with Timorese doctors and nurses delivering services to the remotest corners of the country and training our medical and health personnel.

The members of the famous Cuban Medical Brigade are true missionaries equally deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize as Mother Theresa.

In Timor-Leste we are finalising this year our own Road Map – 2011-2030 Strategic Development Plan that will lift our people from centuries of poverty into an upper middle income country by 2030.

### ***3. Good governance***

In regards to the management of our petroleum resources, we are pleased to note that the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in its latest report of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010 gave Timor-Leste the number one spot in Asia and number three in the world for sound, transparent and effective management of our oil and gas revenues.

However, we acknowledge that we have a long way to go to combat corruption and waste in other areas. Early this year we have set up an Anti-Corruption Commission. This, working with the competent Parliamentary Committee on Good Governance, the Ombudsman for Justice and Human Rights, Inspector-General of the State and Prosecutor-General, will be able to stamp out this malignant cancer in our society and administration.

### ***4. Human Rights, empowerment of women and youth***

Women make up almost 30% of the deputies in our National Parliament. In the executive branch, key cabinet positions, namely, Finance, Justice, Social Solidarity, Prosecutor-General, etc are held by women.

A Youth Parliament has been elected and will have its first formal sitting in November this year, comprising 130 youth Parliamentarians, ranging in ages from 12 to 17. I'm pleased that our expectations to have a balanced gender representation were in fact exceeded. The Youth Parliament has 68 girls and 62 boys deputies.

Timor-Leste is proud to have one of the most humanist Constitutions in the world that prohibits the death penalty and the maximum prison sentence is 25 years.

We have also ratified all core International Human Rights Treaties. We have now submitted two Treaty reports to the relevant Treaty bodies and we will continue to strive to enhance respect for human rights, freedom and dignity for all. Our Constitution gives primacy to International Law over domestic laws, i. e., all our laws must conform with International Law.

### ***5. Justice with compassion***

As Head of State, guided by humanist beliefs and the relevant provisions of our Constitution, I have issued pardons to individuals who have been tried, found guilty by the courts and have served a number of years with good behaviour.

We believe that the pursuit of Justice cannot be dissociated from other overwhelming values such as compassion and understanding the mitigating circumstances.

Recently I issued pardons to all those former soldiers and police officers involved in violence in 2006 and 2008, including those found guilty by the courts of law of involvement in the assassination attempt on my own life. They have returned to their humble homes, to their wives and children.

### ***6. The Cuban Five in US and US embargo on Cuba***

We will now turn to some international issues. We appeal to President Barack Obama to sign an executive order releasing five Cuban citizens who are languishing in US jails for over 10 years, denied family visits and visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The US should likewise lift the draconian financial and economic sanctions and trade embargo against Cuba. The Cuban people are among the few in the world who are still suffering the inequities of the Cold War era. It seems that for some in the U. S. And in particular in the State of Florida, the Cold War is not over.

The same time we commend the Cuban authorities for releasing some prisoners. Inspired by the best ideals of the Cuban humanist tradition, we hope that all remaining prisoners will be returned to their homes and families.

### ***7. Daw Aung Suu Kjie, the situation in Myanmar***

The situation in Myanmar is an immensely complex one. It is a vast country fragmented along ethnic lines and plagued by numerous armed groups fighting with different agendas, some among them involved in illicit drug business.

And based on our own experience, we believe that to manage such complex challenges, be it in our own country or Myanmar, we must all show wisdom and engage in patient dialogue those who don't agree with us, so that together we pull our country out of conflict and poverty.

Mrs Suu Kjie is a pacifist fighter, whose integrity has been tested under the most difficult circumstances; she is an advocate of tolerance, inclusion and reconciliation. It is not only unjust and illegal her continuing detention but it is also unwise as Mrs Suu Kjie is a revered leader who

working with the military leaders would be able to bring about gradual peaceful changes in Myanmar.

### ***8. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict***

We commend the Israeli and Palestinian leaders for the renewed dialogue under the auspices of the U.S. Administration.

To those in Palestine who in spite of decades of suffering and humiliation have resisted the temptation of extremism and violence I bow to them.

To those in Israel who have championed the cause of peace and the rights of the Palestinian people I will say you represent the very best of the Jewish people, a people who more than anyone else on earth should understand the suffering and desire of others for freedom.

We urge the Hamas to show statesmanship by recognizing the State of Israel. Extremism, fanaticism and indiscriminate violence do harm to the noble Palestinian quest for dignity and freedom.

Hamas and Hezbollah are genuine popular movements deeply rooted in the millions of poor, dispossessed, alienated and angry. Labelling them "terrorists" and refusing to engage and build bridges with such groups, in our view, is not a sound policy.

In Afghanistan where the Taliban are labelled "terrorists" there is now a realization that peace is possible only via dialogue with that popular movement.

We urge Israel, a country rooted in 5,000 years of history, born of centuries of persecution and wars, to show the wisdom and magnanimity of the Jews by ending the Gaza blockade, allowing unhindered access for humanitarian assistance, and ending the land grabbing and colonization of the West Bank.

### ***9. The question of Western Sahara***

The aborted decolonization of Western Sahara and the endless plight of hundreds of thousands of Saharawis in camps in Algeria constitute an indictment of the international community for its inability to resolve this old conflict. This is not an issue as complex as Afghanistan or Palestine. And how can we believe that there will be an early resolution of these seemingly intractable problems when there seems to be little political will to solve the Western Sahara problem, a much less complex issue?

### ***10. Climate Change – A test of leadership***

While it is a fact that the rich and the powerful contributed most to the deteriorating world's environment, we acknowledge that the advance of science, technology and industries in the last 200 years have brought enormous benefits to all of us, even if in an unequal manner.

But we in the developing world should not put all the blame on the rich and the powerful for the harm done to the planet. We must acknowledge our share of responsibility in the destruction of our forests, lakes, rivers and seas.

Asia has no less responsibility than the US and Europe to reverse the climate calamity. We are responsible because we are almost half of the planet's inhabitants! This alone means that we put enormous pressure on the land, our minerals, forests and water.

To modernise our economies and improve the lives of the hundreds of millions of our poor, we use increasingly more energy extracted from the Earth. And like the Americans and the Europeans have done for the past 200 years, we are now searching for energy in far away regions like Africa and South America!

Asia of today is a rich, proud and vibrant Asia holding collectively the largest reserves of wealth in the world. Asians master science and technology with its thousands of scholars, scientists, innovators, entrepreneurs.

So we appeal to our fellow Asian leaders to take centre stage and lead us with wisdom, mobilize our economists, planners, managers, scientists and scholars and design an "Asian Road Map" to eliminate extreme poverty, illiteracy - the roots of discontentment and extremism – and reverse the degradation of our collective environment.

Almost one year after the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit there is a feeling of *déjà vue*, that there will be no progress in Cancun in terms of meaningful collective action to slow down the rapid deterioration of planet Earth.

The gap between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, has not being bridged. While some countries have made tangible efforts in reducing their own CO2 emissions, the sum of these individual efforts are dwarfed by the inexorable deterioration of the environment.

What can we do collectively to move forward? A new nuanced approach, without confrontation, taking into consideration the sensitivities and interests of all parties, in particular the more vulnerable nations, and the legitimate demands of the rich industrial powers and of the emerging industrial powers like India, China, Brazil?

Asia is home to half of the world's population, 60% of the world's poor and yet it has the largest accumulated wealth in terms of cash reserves.

If we don't act now, in few decades many hundreds of millions of fellow Asians will be up-rooted and become climate refugees exacerbating existing tensions and conflicts; we will kill each other over water, land and energy resources in addition to the decades old border conflicts, religious and ethnic tensions and regional rivalries that have plagued our region.

Hence we call for an Asian common agenda on sustainable development anchored on environmental protection and recovery, on land and water management, health and education for all, on poverty and illiteracy elimination.

Asians who have shown ingenuity and creativity over thousands of years must today innovate and invest even more in research in renewable energy and find ways out of fossil fuel for our industries and cities; rather finger pointing and engage in the blame game, Asians must show greater wisdom and launch clean cities campaign everywhere, in every city, every town; we must stop commercial logging and the continuing destruction of our forests; we must replant, put back the hundreds of millions of trees that out of necessity or greed we took away from the soil and thus cause desertification, soil erosion, floods, land slides. We must stop dumping plastics

and all forms of non-degradable material into our lakes, rivers and seas that destroy our rich coral life and fish stocks. We must turn waste into clean energy; we must stop wasting water.

### ***11. Appeal to the rich and powerful***

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We appeal to the rich and powerful to ask themselves whether they have delivered on the promises and whether past practices have been adequate.

All too often leaders of the developing countries are blamed for the lack of improvements in the lives of our people in spite of the generous development assistance we supposedly have received from the rich.

Past and current leaders are blamed for mismanagement, waste and in some instances outright theft. There is a lot of truth in all these allegations. But recent scandals in the U.S. and in some European countries like the U.K. show that corruption, bad governance and incompetence are not monopolies of the Third World. Those who lecture us the most are now harvesting the consequences of their own colossal mistakes, incompetence and corruption at every level.

Donors should also do an honest and critical analysis of their policies. And we can provide valuable input with abundant examples of how the aid money was misspent by the donors themselves.

We do not wish to sound ungrateful. We are not. We know there is a genuine sentiment of solidarity by the men and women in the streets in the U.S., Europe, Japan, towards their fellow human beings in poorer regions of the world. But we must be frank in telling the rich donors that they must change and change seriously in the way they approach the whole development strategy.

Donors must invest more of every dollar they pledge to rural development, agriculture and food security, water and sanitation, on roads, health and education – and less on themselves.

When we ask a rich “donor” to send in a group of “experts” to do a study on poverty and on why we are poor, a platoon of experts in dark suits and safari hats, well supplied with mosquito repellents, descends on us overnight, talks to us for hours, takes copious notes, and finally writes up long reports with laudable recommendations.

Frankly even a seven year old can easily download such studies from Google. I confess I am one of those who rely on my little nieces to search and download most of the information and complex studies on issues ranging from agriculture to city planning to oil and gas pipelines! And they don’t demand hundreds of thousands of dollars in fee. The most they now ask in return is one of latest gadgets like an Ipad or an Iphone. Only few years ago I would pay their work by taking them to an ice cream parlour and a couple of chocolate ice cream scoops would satisfy them. Now they are asking a bit more like an Ipad but they are still so much less demanding than the famous (or infamous) international consultants.

To strengthen national institutions and the democratically-elected leaders donors must provide more direct budget support to enable them to deliver services and development to the people.



The multiple layers of rules, regulations, procedures and bureaucracy constitute a real obstacle to aid effectiveness. Bi-lateral and multilateral donors must also reform and streamline their own aid mechanisms.

It is disheartening that only a handful of rich countries have met the target of 0,7% of gross national product for development assistance. Generous pledges made in the spotlight of international conferences, side by side with movie stars and rock singers, are largely forgotten the moment the Hollywood curtains fall and the flood lights are turned off.

It is even more disheartening to see how quickly tens of billions of dollars were easily found to rescue failed banks, insurance companies, fraudulent real state agencies, obsolete auto industries; how tens of millions of dollars in bonuses are paid to incompetents and crooks responsible for the financial debacle – and yet decades of appeals to the rich to increase foreign development assistance have met with much resistance.

We believe that one wise and fair way to assist countries suffering from the consequences of the financial meltdown is to write off all the debt owed by the LDCs and Small Island Developing States, and to restructure the debt of other debtor countries.

Timor-Leste is in the unique privileged situation of not having a single cent in foreign debt. So what we are proposing is not motivated by self-interests. We believe it is a question of decency and morality that the rich countries that acted so quickly and decisively to rescue failed banks, insurance companies and bogus real state agencies, should write off the debt that entraps hundreds of million in the developing world.

Timor-Leste and other post-conflict, fragile nations, numbering 300 million people, are struggling to consolidate peace and our State institutions. We appeal to the international donor community to expand and enhance support in a timely manner in support of our efforts to put conflict and extreme poverty behind.

## **12. UN reform**

More than sixty years after its founding, the UN has yet to undertake meaningful reforms to make it more representative of the world of 21<sup>st</sup> Century and more effective.

We are not talking only about an expanded and more representative UNSC. We are talking about making the UN and its many agencies and programs less bureaucratic and more efficient in their internal management and services delivery.

Some UN agencies and programs that advise us on good governance and human resources development are themselves in dire need of reform to make them more effective, leaner and expeditious in delivering on their responsibilities.

In regards to the UNSC, we restate our view that it has to be expanded to accommodate the new demographic and economic realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Major regional powers like India and Brazil must be granted permanent member status in the UNSC.

There are no credible arguments to continue to deny the new emerging regional and global powers their rightful place in the day-to-day deliberations of the UNSC.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

In concluding, on behalf of our people, I thank the international community for the steady and generous assistance provided us in our years of need.

We would not have been able to achieve the progress of the last three years without the understanding of our friends and partners.

Bi-lateral as well as multilateral partners, the World Bank, IMF, the UN and its affiliate agencies and programs, regional institutions like the European Commission and Asian Development Bank, national and international NGOs, have been central to our success so far.

We are particularly grateful to Australia and New Zealand, two reliable friends and neighbours who since 2006, at the height of the security crisis in Timor-Leste, have provided friendly and professional security assistance to us and have shouldered the burden of the costs. From a peak of 3,500 security forces in 2006 they have downsized their troop presence in Timor-Leste about 500. Malaysia and Portugal also promptly responded to our appeal for assistance and since mid 2006 the two countries continue to deploy Special Forces as part of the United Nations police mission in Timor-Leste.

Our other neighbour, Indonesia, has extended us a hand of friendship since our separation in 1999. Showing great maturity that is the hallmark of great societies, Indonesian leaders and people have taken steps to assist us in many ways, including in ensuring security and stability in our common border. Cross border movement of people and goods, student and cultural exchanges, trade and investment are flourishing. And with Indonesia's patronage Timor-Leste will soon join the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN).

We can all do better in Timor-Leste and elsewhere. And we must. With humility we acknowledge our failings and limitations. We are determined to live up to the expectations of our people and lead them towards a peaceful and prosperous future.

May God the Almighty and the Merciful Bless us All.

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