



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
30 October 2008

GOVERNMENT TO OPEN DISCUSSION ON LAND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Timor-Leste hopes to pass a Transitional Land Law in the near future

Today in Dili the Minister of Justice, Lucia Lobato, announced at a public meeting that the Government is considering a policy framework that will become the basis for Timor-Leste's long awaited land law.

The *Policy Framework for a Transitional Land Law* was prepared by a legal team from the USAID-funded "Ita Nia Rai" ("Our Land") program in consultation with representatives of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the National Directorate for Land, Property & Cadastral Services (DNTPSC) and other Timorese stakeholders. It also draws upon extensive research that has been conducted in Timor-Leste since 2000 by organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and academic institutions such as the Australian National University, as well as on best practices from other countries. "We use the word 'transitional' because this law is designed to determine first-time land ownership in independent Timor-Leste," commented the program's senior legal advisor Nigel Thomson. He clarified that if the legislation is passed as proposed, future land transactions will be regulated by a separate law.

"The Transitional Land Law will be a critical legal framework for Timor-Leste in many ways. Most importantly, it will provide more secure land tenure for the most disadvantaged group in the country; the poor." Commented Mr. Thomson.

Minister Lobato announced that the Government intends to open the policy for discussion in the near future. "This is a critical policy for Timor-Leste, because the majority of our people have only one source of livelihood: their land," she commented. She added that "the Government hopes that clarifying land rights and providing a framework for solving land disputes will increase stability in communities and help to prevent future conflict about land." The Minister also commented that that formalizing property rights will contribute to economic development by providing a sounder environment for private sector investment.

The *Transitional Land Law* will set out the criteria to resolve conflicting land claims and issue Timor-Leste's first land titles. A stand-alone Land and Property Commission, an independent administrative body, is one institutional option for administering the land law "This mechanism could allow people who don't normally have access to the justice system to receive equal consideration in case of dispute," commented Mr. Thomson.

STRENGTHENING PROPERTY RIGHTS IN TIMOR-LESTE **Balide, Dili, Timor-Leste**

For more information, please contact:

Breanna Ridsdel

TEL: +670 731 2407

Email: bridsdel@sprtl.tl

Jose Caetano Guterres

TEL: +670 730 4325

Email: jcaetano@sprtl.tl



PRESS RELEASE

Despite these provisions, the five-year, \$10 million support program believes that land disputes will be in the minority of overall land claims, and hopes that most disputes can be solved at a local level, using a combined approach based in traditional dispute resolution practices and formal mediation.

Working with the DNTPSC, the USAID-funded Ita Nia Rai program will start collecting land claims in two pilot areas of Timor-Leste in just a few weeks time. “We know that a great deal of land in Timor-Leste is used or owned communally, by families or groups of people,” commented Grant Cullen, the program’s senior land administration specialist. “Our claims framework allows an unlimited number of people to make a joint ownership claim, as well as allowing for individual and organizational claims,” he said. All claims will be open to scrutiny by the local community, and the final results will be entered into a national database that will be used by the Government to issue land titles once the law has been approved by Parliament.

The Ita Nia Rai (‘Our Land’) program is a five-year project funded by The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by ARD Inc., ACDI/VOCA, and Land Equity International, organizations with worldwide experience in developing land systems in post-conflict countries and in conflict prevention for community stabilization. Working with the DNTPSC and the Ministry of Justice, the program provides technical and policy support to develop a sustainable and transparent property rights system in Timor-Leste.

- Ends

STRENGTHENING PROPERTY RIGHTS IN TIMOR-LESTE Balide, Dili, Timor-Leste

For more information, please contact:

Breanna Ridsdel

TEL: +670 731 2407

Email: bridsdel@sprtl.tl

Jose Caetano Guterres

TEL: +670 730 4325

Email: jcaetano@sprtl.tl