



OPEN LETTER FROM FONGTIL TO HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Dili, September 4th, 2024

To Your Holiness Pope Francis, with our love,

Welcome to Timor-Leste.

On this occasion, please receive the thoughts of the Timor-Leste NGO Forum (FONGTIL), an umbrella organization including more than 400 NGOs and Community Based Organizations throughout Timor-Leste.

FONGTIL and Timor-Leste are proud and happy to be visited by the highest leader of the Catholic Church, Your Holiness Pope Francis. We hope this visit will help us find the best ways to develop our Nation and to confront the problems facing our society -- poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, inequality, and social and economic injustice.

This visit takes place at a very different time than when the Timorese people received a visit from His Holiness Pope John Paul II in 1989. At that time, the people of Timor-Leste were living under brutal Indonesian military occupation. The Holy Father helped mobilize and open the eyes of the international community to the suffering of the Timorese people and our struggle for independence.

Today, Your Holiness Pope Francis is visiting us in an era of independence and freedom, when the Indonesian military is no longer here. Timor-Leste's self-determination came about through the strong struggle of the people of Timor-Leste, with great support from the international community, including the Catholic church. We can celebrate together during this visit.

As an independent state, Timor-Leste has made much progress after the war with Indonesia: we have free and democratic elections, and freedom of movement, although there are some challenges. Timor-Leste has some financial reserves from exporting oil and gas; although these currently pay for most of the Nation's needs, the resources are limited and the situation is not sustainable.

We have sovereign, legitimate state institutions that design national policy intended to build an equitable and sustainable society. Timor-Leste has a strong, critical, civil society which is the state's strategic partner for national development and further progress.

Although some progress has been made in the 25 years since the 1999 referendum, Timor-Leste continues to face many challenges, including structural problems, quality universal education,

clean water, housing for the people, nutrition, food sovereignty, rural roads, and public health. Although the authorities and the people are trying to address these, there is a long way to go. Your Holiness has often spoken out for poor and marginalized people, and we encourage you to do so in Timor-Leste.

We appreciate the Church's recent actions to deal with abuse of women and children, even when committed by Members of the Clergy, and we ask Your Holiness to encourage the leaders and the people of Timor-Leste to take more effective measures to prevent sexual abuse and domestic violence.

Timor-Leste is part of planet Earth, and we agree with Your Holiness, in the second encyclical, that we must all "**Care for our common home**".

As a small country with limited resources and resilience, Timor-Leste is very vulnerable to environmental impacts. In April 2021, Cyclone Seroja killed dozens of our citizens and damaged and destroyed homes, infrastructure and people's possessions; this is but one example of the impacts of climate change here.

We join you in continuing to pray and speak out for the World and for Timor-Leste, in support of humanity's goals of reducing emissions to the atmosphere, restoring the environment from destruction, and ensuring a safe and peaceful world.

FONGTIL is aware that this destruction largely results from the actions of people in larger, richer nations to maximize their economic gain. FONGTIL encourages Your Holiness to continue to work to resolve the global climate crisis.

FONGTIL also appreciates Your Holiness Pope Francis's calls for dialogue and an end to the conflict and crisis in Palestine and other countries who do not enjoy peace. FONGTIL remembers the people of Western Sahara and West Papua, who continue to seek justice and human rights, including self-determination. Your Holiness's presence can help bring the international community's attention to peoples who are occupied or dominated by others.

This concludes our open letter to Your Holiness Pope Francis, and we hope that this letter will truly arrive in Your Holiness's hand.

Finally, thank you very much for your kindness.

With Our Utmost Respect,



Valentim da Costa Pinto
Executive Director of FONGTIL



Inocencio de Jesus Xavier
Chair of the Board of FONGTIL