

## Speech at Timor Sea Justice Campaign protest

Collins Place, 55 Collins St. Melbourne 3 December, 2015

By: Mica Barreto Soares

Dear Australian brothers and sisters,

I thank you all who stand with the people of Timor-Leste in our final struggle to secure our sovereignty, by settling our maritime boundaries. You have big hearts and great souls!

I particularly thank Tom Clarke, Dan Nicholson and Sam King, leaders of the Timor Sea Justice Campaign, for taking up the call for action over many years, and for inviting me to speak today.

Chip Henriss, former ADF soldier and INTERFET member, I thank you for coming to our aid in 1999 and now in 2015. Bless you! We need you and your military colleagues to again stand with us in solidarity, as did the magnificent WW II Commandos, for so many years. They took seriously their debt of honour to our people. They came to our shores, and were protected by our people, who paid heavily. Over 60,000 Timorese dead!

At the time, Australia dropped leaflets from a plane saying "We will never forget you". The Commandos and their families never did, but the Australian Government did, in 1975 in particular. The fall out is with us today as for Australia, the resources in the Timor Sea was a primary interest. This is their unfinished business, and we suffer.

As a Timorese I cannot ignore the wrong that is being done, when our Australian friends have taken up our former Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão's call to "Right the Wrong". A wrong made more sad, as it is perpetrated by our friend and neighbour. Let me make it clear – it is NOT the Australian people who stand with us in solidarity who made it wrong, but it is the Australian Government, successive ones.

For both Timorese and Australians, it can be confusing. We are friends, neighbours, but with a complex history. Australia was the only country in the world to afford *de jure* recognition to Indonesia to enable it to negotiate over resources in the Timor Sea. Resources that belonged to us then and still belong to us now.

Australia as an older democracy, we expected to act better, with decency. They can do so now. It is never too late!

Dear Australian brothers and sisters,

There are also some pertinent facts I want to share with you today.

There are no boundaries between Timor-Leste and Australia, despite misleading comments that we the Timorese want to change the boundaries.

There are resource-sharing arrangements that are temporary and that the Timorese had no choice but to enter into. We had no budget, a shattered state, a shell. What could the leaders do?

Australia has persistently refused to negotiate maritime boundaries with our leaders, despite their cloudy comments, with one Australian Ambassador to Timor-Leste saying, well we could do it but it may take 100 years.

Australia withdrew from the jurisdiction of the ICJ and ITLOS for the express purpose of settling maritime boundary disputes. Guess when they did it? It was just two months before Timor-Leste had its independence restored in 2002. Our Former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri said it was an “unfriendly act.” And I add, it was an act of small soul!

Dear brothers and sisters,

If Australia is as sure of its legal position in the Timor Sea as it claims, why remove the judicial umpire?

Australia prides itself on settling its maritime boundaries bilaterally, amicably and has done so with New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia and Indonesia, but not with Timor-Leste where I belong, not with the people of Timor-Leste of whom I am also part of. We, again, have to ask, why?

They cling to their position on the continental shelf that the weight of legal opinion in Australia and internationally tells us is wrong. We have to ask if they are so sure of their position, test it before the umpire.

Our former Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão has said, “We do not want charity, we want what is our right, to sit at the table and negotiate maritime boundaries, in accordance with International law.”

Our current Prime Minister Dr. Rui Maria de Araujo speaking in New York in October this year, made it very clear, that our nation’s quest to settle maritime boundaries was “a matter of principle.” It is! It is a matter of our national sovereignty!

Come on Australian Government, “give us a fair go.”

Thank you!

Viva Timor-Leste, Viva People’s Solidarity, Friends of Timor-Leste, Viva Timor Sea Justice Campaign Team!