

PRESS STATEMENT OF H.E. MINISTER XANANA GUSMÃO FOLLOWING MEETING WITH U.N. SECRETARY-GENERAL H.E. BAN KI-MOON

New York, 14 April 2016

- On behalf of the Government of Timor-Leste, I just met with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Ban Ki-Moon. The Secretary-General has been a long-time supporter of our development and shows great interest in our country.
- I requested a meeting to discuss the national priority of our nation – delimiting our permanent maritime boundaries.
- We fought a long struggle for 24 years for our independence and for sovereignty over our land.
- Now we are in a new struggle – to secure sovereign rights over our seas.
- We seek to have our maritime boundaries set in accordance with international law.
- We have already began discussions with our friend, Indonesia.
- But Australia has consistently refused to speak to us. They have refused to respect international law and the law of the sea.
- When we were a new nation, we were young and inexperienced, we did not know our rights under international law.
- Australia took advantage of our vulnerability and we signed agreements not about our maritime boundaries; but agreements on how to share resources in the Timor Sea – resources that under international law belong to Timor-Leste.
- We have asked to talk to Australia over and over again. Even after they spied on us, and they bugged our cabinet room during treaty negotiations, we put our relationship first.
- It is now time for us to achieve the last step in our long struggle for sovereignty.
- We cannot take Australia to an international court. This is because two months before our nation became independent, Australia withdrew from the binding jurisdiction of UNCLOS dispute resolution bodies. They did this because they knew they were wrong.
- While Australia has settled its maritime boundaries with all its other neighbours, it denies us our rights under international law and refuses to talk to us to settle the final 2% of their vast maritime boundary.
- And so, Australia has left us with no choice and no other avenue.
- This week we notified Australia that we would be using the Compulsory Conciliation provisions under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- We are the first country to use this procedure but, as I told the Secretary-General today, we have faith in international law and the international system.
- Australia tells other nations to respect international law in the South China Sea, now we are asking them to respect international law in the Timor Sea.
- We look forward to working with the United Nations, with the independent conciliators and with Australia, to achieve our national priority – sovereignty over our seas as well as our lands.