

## VOICE OF AMERICA

ASIA

# East Timor Takes Maritime Dispute With Australia to UN Court

September 28, 2016 6:55 AM Phil Mercer

SYDNEY — East Timor has accused Australia of being a bully as the International Court of Arbitration in the Netherlands prepares to hear a decade-long dispute over the sharing of oil and mineral wealth in the Timor Sea.

East Timor — also known as Timor Leste — wants the International Court of Arbitration in The Hague to decide which country owns a large undersea oil and gas field. The East Timorese government believes Australia is receiving more than it is entitled to under an international convention.

The court has said it will oversee a compulsory conciliation between the two countries on their disputed maritime boundary, rejecting objections from Australia.

The judicial process could decide on which side of the maritime border lies a large oil and gas field over which the two nations have a revenue-sharing agreement.

Both sides will now enter into a negotiation process that will take place behind closed doors over the next 12 months.

Jose Ramos Horta, the former East Timorese president, says his country is standing up to a bully.

“Throughout the Pacific region, Southeast Asia, people [are] looking at Timor Leste with admiration. Wow, they have the courage, the guts to stand up to this bullying regional power [and] taking immense risk,” he said.

Australian officials have said that existing bilateral treaties between the Asia-Pacific neighbors had been “hugely beneficial,” but that Canberra would accept the court’s decision.

The case has strained relations that have previously been close after Australia supported East Timor’s successful campaign for independence from Indonesia in the late 1990s. The young nation is beset by serious economic problems, with annual per capita income estimated at around \$5,600.

In July, the U.N. Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled against Chinese claims to rights in the South China Sea, supporting a case brought by the Philippines. In that case, Beijing refused to participate and has said it does not recognize the ruling.