

Speech for Treaty Signing Ceremony – 6 March, 2018 – United Nations

By Minister Agio Pereira

H.E. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

H.E. Ambassador Peter Taksøe-Jensen, Chairman, Conciliation Commission, Dr. Rosalie Balkin, Judge Abdul Koroma, Professor Donald McRae, Judge Rudiger Wolfrum

H.E. Julie Bishop, Foreign Minister, Australia, H.E. Deputy Secretary Gary Quinlan, Her Excellency Gillian Bird, Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, H.E. Peter Roberts, Australian Ambassador to Timor-Leste, Mr. John Reid, Agent for Australia

H.E. Dr. Aurelio Guterres, Foreign Minister, Timor-Leste, H.E. Ambassador Milena Pires, H.E. Ambassador Abel Guterres

Today is a momentous day that will be recorded in Timor-Leste's history, and be remembered and celebrated.

We are especially pleased to be here today before Your Excellency the Secretary-General, a very great friend of Timor-Leste.

You made bold moves to help our struggle to independence many years ago, something we remain grateful for.

23 months ago, Timor-Leste initiated a never-before-activated mechanism within the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea to seek the delimitation of a permanent maritime boundary between Timor-Leste and Australia in the Timor Sea.

Compulsory conciliation was an unproven procedure and we were reluctant to be the "test case".

Nevertheless, we were advised by leading experts in international law that this was our one and only recourse given the circumstances of the disagreement with our neighbour, Australia.

So, we embarked upon the process with no small amount of uncertainty, but also anticipation.

This was, but is no longer, uncharted territory.

The Conciliation Commission was constituted to help Timor-Leste and Australia reach an agreement on maritime boundaries. Thanks to the committed engagement of the Australian government to this process, and the invaluable facilitation of the Conciliation Commission, this has now been achieved.

We look forward to continuing the important discussions regarding the successful development of Greater Sunrise. We are most grateful to the Commissioners and their advisors, each of whom performed extraordinary work in helping to frame several development concepts which will surely inform further discussions between the Parties.

These negotiations have been tough, and important to both Australia and Timor-Leste.

In the end, this process has been a success.

The Timor-Leste team, the Australian team, the honourable Commissioners, and the representatives of the Permanent Court of Arbitration...

worked tirelessly throughout the process to shape an outcome that would reflect the principles of international law, and that would be equitable and sustainable.

As we stand here today, I am acutely appreciative of the fact that we have arrived at this historic moment owing to the tremendous dedication of the leadership of both Timor-Leste and Australia to this process, and to the herculean efforts of the Conciliation Commission.

I want to thank Her Excellency Minister Julie Bishop.

The commitment that the Australian government demonstrated to the process, your constructive engagement, made it possible for us to conclude this Treaty within the short timeframe of the conciliation.

I also want to express my personal gratitude for the graciousness you have shown me and my colleagues.

It is impossible to overstate the role of the Conciliation Commission and the immense contribution of the commissioners, each one an expert and leading light in his and her respective fields.

Dr. Rosalie Balkin...

Judge Abdul Koroma...

Professor Donald McRae...

Judge Rudiger Wolfrum...

And the Commission Chairman, His Excellency Ambassador Peter Taksøe-Jensen who brought his legal expertise, his supreme diplomatic skills and his Nordic determination to bear to drive the conciliation to a productive result for both Parties.

We are indebted to you.

We thank also our Chief Negotiator Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão for his wisdom and leadership.

Although he is unable to be here today, he is here with us in spirit.

Timor-Leste is a strong believer in international law, and a faithful supporter of multilateral systems.

As a nation modest in population and size, we hold tight to the basic principle of the equality of States.

Throughout Timor-Leste's history, we have employed multilateral systems to pursue our just cause – to gain independence for our country.

Today, we continue to lean on the international system to complete our sovereignty.

Timor-Leste therefore takes our membership in UNCLOS seriously, and are fully conscious of our duties enshrined in UNCLOS, and in the bilateral agreement into which we enter today.

The Treaty we are signing is a good treaty.

It is an equitable and forward-looking treaty delimiting a permanent maritime boundary in the Timor Sea, guided by the principle of achieving an equitable solution.

This treaty establishes a Special Regime for the Greater Sunrise gas field, and a pathway to the development of the resource.

The conclusion of this Treaty now clarifies the rights and responsibilities of Timor-Leste and Australia with regard to the resources and activities that fall within our respective sovereign territories.

This Treaty also institutes certainty in the interest of investment and economic development.

In the process of forging this agreement, Timor-Leste and Australia have developed a deeper mutual understanding and greater mutual respect.

With the signing of this Treaty today, we write a new chapter in the friendship between our two countries.

Timor-Leste and Australia are friends and neighbours.

This is an important new beginning. I look forward to our two countries working together in the future for the advancement and prosperity of our people, nations and region.

Thank you.
