

Timor-Leste: Treaty Signing Ceremony

Transcript, E&OE

United Nations Headquarters, New York

6 March 2018

JULIE BISHOP: Thank you Under-Secretary-General.

Minister Pereira, Secretary-General, Commissioners, Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen. I am pleased to have signed our maritime boundary treaty on behalf of Australia, alongside our good friend and neighbour, Timor-Leste. I thank the UN Secretary-General for his presence here today and for his words of support.

This is an historic day for both our nations. We recognise that it is a particularly important day for Timor-Leste and another step forward in Timor's journey as a sovereign nation. The United Nations is a fitting location for this auspicious landmark event. The UN plays the leading role in the system of international rules and institutions that allow States to coexist peacefully and prosper together. As we said in Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper, released late last year, Australia believes the international rules-based order is fundamental to our collective security and prosperity. Our treaty reflects the value and importance of those rules and institutions, and the benefits for states in abiding by those rules. In particular, our treaty reflects the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – UNCLOS.

As a maritime trading nation, Australia will continue to be a staunch supporter of UNCLOS and its dispute settlement processes.

This treaty was the result of the first-ever UNCLOS conciliation. Like any negotiation, it required compromise and good will on both sides. By signing this Treaty, both governments have judged it has delivered a fair and equitable outcome. The conciliation shows how international law can enable countries to resolve their disputes peacefully.

It is an example for all of how the international rules-based order serves our collective interests. Much of this outcome is due to the crucial work of the independent Conciliation Commission, members of which are present here today. On behalf of Australia, I thank you for your efforts and your dedication over the past 20 months, and for your utmost independence and integrity. The conciliation was Timor-Leste's proposal.

Australia has participated since the outset and I was pleased to have been personally involved in this process. Timor-Leste and Australia each recommended two members of the Commission, and the Chair was chosen by the other Commissioners under the auspices of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Australia and Timor-Leste are honoured that such eminent diplomats, legal scholars and jurists enlisted in our cause. The Commission drew on its own independent technical advice. The Commissioners have each played an objective, forthright and rigorously independent role. I also thank the Permanent Court of Arbitration for its role in supporting the Commission, and for the hard work of its staff. Since 1899, the PCA has played a crucial, if often understated, role in the international legal framework helping states and other parties resolve disputes, alongside other forms of dispute resolution.

Australia is pleased to see the PCA's role strengthening and expanding, and on the basis of today's achievement, we look to its future work being even more influential in supporting the international system. With this treaty, we open a new chapter in relations between Australia and Timor-Leste. Australia has an enduring interest in a stable and prosperous Timor-Leste. As good friends and close neighbours, we want Timor-Leste to achieve its economic potential. We have historical and geographical ties, and deep people-to-people links, which we will continue to nurture. We will continue our support for Timor-Leste's economic and human development. The treaty is an important step that opens the way to develop a rich, shared resource: the Greater Sunrise gas fields.

We know this resource is crucial to Timor-Leste's development.

As is apparent, the development of this resource will deliver significant benefit to Timor-Leste. This will require support of the private-sector oil and gas Joint Venture partners, whose capacity to develop and operate the project will depend on its economic viability. We look forward to release of the Commission's independent report and its analysis of the options to develop Greater Sunrise. We also look forward to collaborating with Timor-Leste, as it works with the Joint Venture companies to find an economically viable pathway to develop Greater Sunrise. Together, we can now ensure that Timor-Leste reaps the economic and social benefits for generations to come.

This treaty reflects a new chapter in Australia – Timor-Leste relations.

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