

Don't Give Up on Greater Sunrise, Downer Advises Timor-Leste

Exclusive: Jornal Independente, 23 May 2011

DILI: Woodside and its joint venture partners must be generous to Timor-Leste when it comes to the Greater Sunrise oil exploration project, former Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said.

“It’s my view that these oil and gas companies must be generous to East Timor, whatever the mechanical ways they develop these fields. But I think they need to be generous to East Timor and look after the people of East Timor,” Mr Downer said in an exclusive interview with *Independente* after he attended the ceremony to mark the 9th anniversary of Timor-Leste’s independence restoration in Dili on Friday.

Mr Downer signed the Greater Sunrise Agreement with Timor-Leste’s then Foreign Minister, Jose Ramos-Horta, in 2006 in Canberra, Australia.

“I want to hear what Woodside (and its joint venture partners) have to say about Greater Sunrise,” Mr Downer said.

“I am not in the Australian government any more. It’s not my responsibility these days. But Dr Alkatiri and I negotiated the original agreement. (That has) been very beneficial to East Timor. You have eight billion dollars that you’ve generated in revenue from the Timor Sea thanks to the agreement negotiated by Dr Alkatiri and me.

“So I think don’t give up. I think we can keep working on it.”

When asked about the Gusmão Government’s push for a pipeline to Timor-Leste, Mr Downer said he was not involved in that discussion.

“The Australian government has a view on that but Woodside have a view and their consortium (also has a view). You’ll have to take that up with them,” Mr Downer said.

The Greater Sunrise Agreement was achieved in 2006 after difficult and drawn out negotiations between the government of Timor-Leste, then led by Dr Alkatiri, and the Australian government led by then Prime Minister John Howard.

Since 2007, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão’s government has been trying to persuade Woodside and its joint venture partners to bring the oil and gas pipeline to Timor-Leste but it has not yet had a positive result.

While in Dili, Mr Downer also met with former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri at the Fretilin Central Committee headquarters in Komoro last week to talk about Greater Sunrise.

Dr Alkatiri said both he and Mr Downer felt sad because the negotiations had not progressed further.

“When we talked about the Timor Sea in the past... many times we got angry at each other because he defended Australia’s interests and I defended Timor-Leste’s interests,” he said.

Dr Alkatiri said he wanted to help in the negotiation process but the Gusmão Government had declined his offer.
