

La'ò Hamutuk

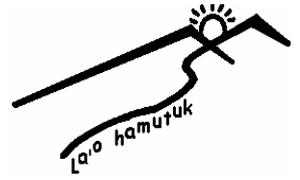
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His Excellency Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão,
Prime Minister,
Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste,
Palacio do Governo,
Dili, Timor-Leste

13 February 2009

Mr. Prime Minister,

We write to you today to ask the Government of Timor-Leste to speak out to protect the rights of civilians in Sri Lanka.

As you know, violence between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has escalated as government military forces step-up operations, attempting to defeat the Tamil opposition by force. These operations are having devastating impacts on civilians and fail to recognize that a true resolution to the conflict can only be achieved through a peace process that respects the legitimate needs of both parties. As a result, hundreds of thousands of non-combatants are trapped by the fighting. They have been deprived of adequate food, shelter and medical care, and of access to a safe, neutral space.

As people who have experienced several waves of conflict through war, occupation and colonialism, Timor-Leste citizens empathize with the suffering of the Sri Lankan people caught in the conflict. We too had to flee our homes. Our schools, hospitals, fields and houses were also destroyed, and we still feel the impacts of this on our health, education and livelihoods. We live with the legacy of years of violence and brutality, of the deaths of friends and family. We urge all possible diplomatic and political measures to ease the similar suffering of people in Northern Sri Lanka.

Many Sri Lankan friends supported Timor-Leste during our struggle for independence. Today, as full members of the international community, we have the means to assist them during this difficult time.

Earlier this week the President of the Republic appealed for the protection of civilians and progress towards a legitimate peace process. We ask the Government of Timor-Leste to follow President Horta's example and lend its voice through the United Nations and other channels for:

- The establishment of a 'safe zone' respected by both parties, with a non-partisan presence, such as the United Nations, where humanitarian agencies can provide adequate shelter, food and medicines for those fleeing the violence.
- Free and full access to humanitarian agencies, human rights monitors and independent media to the conflict area.
- All possible efforts to facilitate a return to dialogue to find a lasting resolution with respect to the legitimate needs of both parties, ensuring that the Tamil people in the North-East can make decisions about the areas where they live.

We also ask the Government of Timor-Leste to support processes to build peace, dialogue and reconciliation in Sri Lanka, and to guarantee the rights of all people living in the disputed area, not only the military and the LTTE, to participate in decisions on its future.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maximus Tahu', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Maximus Tahu

On behalf of La'o Hamutuk
Farol, Dili

CC: Mr. Atul Khare, Special Representative of the Secretary-General
Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta, President of Timor-Leste
Mr. Zacarias Albano da Costa, Minister for Foreign Affairs