

# FORUM ONG TIMOR LESTE THE TIMOR LESTE NGO FORUM



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Statement by NGOs

## Timor-Leste and Development Partners' Meeting

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We thank the Ministry of Finance for allowing NGOs to participate at this forum and in the national priorities process. We encourage you to read our complete statement, which is available in the meeting packs. With no opportunity for bilateral meetings this week, we hope to meet with individual agencies, ministries and donors over the coming months. Today, I will just read a brief synopsis of our statement.

**We welcome the Government's** upcoming unveiling of the Strategic Development Plan - bringing a longer term vision to post-crisis Timor-Leste. *We urge the government to make this truly a national plan, with input from a variety of people and sectors before it is implemented, and we hope that a timetable and process for consultation and Parliamentary approval will be made available soon.*

Pakote Referendum We hope that the 2009 *Pakote Referendum* will be used as a learning experience – that unplanned, off-budget, unspecified, poorly-overseen small projects cannot substitute for a plan which identifies priority infrastructure needs and projects and integrates them into Timor-Leste's national requirements.

Food security and nutrition are linked. Food security should be achieved with more attention to nutrition. This is not automatic, and often nutritious food is sold to obtain money to purchase less healthy food such as noodles, candy, rice and non food items. *Linking nutrition to food security programs would ensure that children are eating locally-produced, quality food.*

Early Childhood Development is critical. Most of the few pre-primary schools in Timor-Leste are concentrated in cities, and children more remote areas rarely have access. This affects their retention and repetition of grades when they enter basic schools. *We urge the Government to work proactively with the Church and NGOs to give rural children the best start by allocating sufficient human and financial resources to pre-primary education.*

Justice for past human rights violations. We are very concerned about accountability for past human rights. When Timor Leste surrendered to pressure from Indonesia and released Maternus Bere, it signaled that our government accepts impunity for serious crimes. Executive interference in this case undermined Timor-Leste's national sovereignty, constitutional separation of powers and the rule of law. *We urge development partners, especially the United Nations, to*

*implement the often-repeated promise that impunity can never be tolerated for crimes against humanity.*

*Law of Association and Foundation (5/2005).* NGOs should operate under this law, but fewer than 50 international and national NGOs have registered, and most local NGOs are unable to meet its criteria. *We strongly recommend that this decree law be revised to accommodate the operating environment and the nature of rurally based NGOs.*

*Delivery of Social Services.* We commend the innovation of the joint Ministry of Health and partner task force to support district health services to achieve National Priority commitments.

*Good Governance* depends on participation, which requires citizens to be able to access information. Communities across the world, even when geographically isolated, enjoy cheaper, more accessible and more interactive communications people here, and we hope that the recent liberalisation of telecommunications will improve this. We were amused to see the billboards **proclaiming the Government's new website to the less than 1% of the population who access the web.** *We strongly urge the government to enable all Timorese people to communicate among themselves and with their government.*

*Inviting the Resource Curse.* Timor-Leste is the most petroleum-dependent country in the world. **We are in danger of falling into the "resource curse" that affects countries which rely on converting non-renewable natural resource wealth into cash.** During 2009, Timor-Leste reported \$258 million worth of imports, while non-oil exports totaled only \$8 million, nearly all of which is coffee. This is unsustainable, made possible only by our temporary oil revenues, supplemented with a little donor money. *We urge policy-makers to prioritize strengthening Timor-Leste's ability to produce food, water, energy and other necessities rather than spending dollars on imports, cash handouts, impulsive large projects and subsidies.*

*State Budget.* In order to ensure budget wisdom and accountability, it is critical that civil society be involved in budget processes, which requires timely information in Tetum or Bahasa Indonesia. *We recommend wider consultation in drafting the rectification and 2011 budgets, and encourage more collaboration among state organs and with civil society.*

*Enacting legislation.* Last February, the Council of Ministers announced a very ambitious legislative agenda, with more than 100 laws and decree-laws to be enacted by July. Last year, the government and Parliament held effective consultations on several Parliamentary laws on land, decentralization and the anti-corruption commission. *We encourage transparent, inclusive and deliberative processes for all future Parliamentary and decree laws, with drafts provided in Tetum or Bahasa Indonesia, and longer, more broad-based consultations.*

*Sustainable income and the Petroleum Fund.* 98% of Timor-Leste's state income comes from oil revenues, which should be used sustainably and wisely to support medium- and long-term

development, in accordance with the principles of intergenerational equity in the Petroleum Fund Law. We are unhappy that the Government overspent the Estimated Sustainable Income in 2009, and appreciate that the 2010 State Budget stays within it. We hope that the mid-year rectification and future budgets will also respect sustainability, and that this principle is maintained when the Petroleum Fund Law is reviewed.

Civic education. To ensure participation in all the above planning and implementation, government and donors should invest more in civic education for public officials and citizens, targeting information at communities and local authorities to empower them to contribute to democratic processes. The success of decentralization depends on active participation of the population, including civil society. *We urge the development partners to ramp up civic education and to include civil society in government capacity building towards decentralization in municipalities.*

Anti-Corruption. We welcome the selection of the Anti-Corruption Commissioner (KAK) and deputies. KAK should be allowed to conduct its own investigations of any alleged corruption cases. *KAK should have the authority to audit government transactions. KAK and other agencies must have the resources to work with communities, civil servants and officials to define, prevent and detect corruption.*

Security. Security means freedom from fear – that people can live without worrying about violence, crime, civil disorder, repression, starvation, disease, illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. Although military and police can help, long-lasting security does not come from armed forces or threat of prison, but from knowing that the rule of law will be followed, families can live without major disruptions to their lives, and basic needs will be fulfilled. If many people remain impoverished and alienated while a few enjoy the benefits of affluence and power, no amount of intimidation by men and women with guns can provide security.

We acknowledge the important role of the National Police in protecting the nation as it increasingly assumes responsibilities from UNPOL. In the past, our people have endured repression by foreign security forces and militaristic forms of policing. *We are concerned at increasing reports of human rights violations by PNTL and the growing use of military weapons and tactics.*

Conclusion. Developing Timor-Leste's economy and democracy is a long-term, complex, difficult task which cannot be accomplished by a plethora of disconnected, short-term projects. We hope that the National Plan will begin to change this approach, which is deeply engrained both here and in worldwide development assistance patterns. Timor-Leste needs an integrated and inclusive development plan, which should incorporate input from all our people, including Civil Society and rural citizens. We hope that the Plan will be enacted by Parliament to ensure wide discussion and acceptance.

We look forward to the results of this week's discussions with the hope that their *positive outcomes will compensate for their negative impact on the global climate.*