

Speech as Delivered by Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and Special Advisor of the United Nations Secretary-General for Timor-Leste

2013 Timor-Leste & Development Partners Meeting

Dili, Timor-Leste, 19 June 2013

Your Excellency, Taur Matan Ruak, President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
Your Excellency, Mr. Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
Your Excellency, Mr. Jose Luis Guterres, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
Your Excellency, Ms. Emilia Pires, Minister of Finance
Excellencies,
Development Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

It is my great honor, privilege, and pleasure to address you in my new role as Special Advisor of the United Nations Secretary-General for Timor-Leste. It is a responsibility which I accept with total commitment and humility.

Let me begin by first thanking the Secretary-General for this appointment and for his trust.

He remembers, with affection, his historic visit to Timor-Leste last year.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude and thanks to His Excellency, the President, His Excellency, the Prime Minister, and to the people of Timor-Leste, for embracing me so warmly and to all of you for welcoming me on the occasion of this important meeting.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste's Exceptional Development Journey

This is my first address in my new capacity, and a time for me to listen and to learn. I am very pleased to have had the opportunity this morning to listen carefully to the vision articulated by His Excellency, the President and His Excellency, the Prime Minister. I would like to share three initial thoughts today.

The first is that Timor-Leste is a success story for our region and for the world. Yours is a country of great courage, with a determined people who have sacrificed so much to change and shape your own destiny.

The United Nations and our development partners are proud to have helped facilitate your journey from conflict and fragility towards peace, democracy, resilience, and sustainable development.

In spite of being one of the youngest nations, you have, in only a decade, risen from the ashes of conflict and laid the basic foundations for peace and security, for trust and confidence-building, and for institutions supporting democratic governance.

Your decade-long experience of advances and temporary set-backs has underscored that, in order to sustain this remarkable progress and to achieve the next milestones on this development journey, it is particularly important to consolidate and further invest in three specific elements, as you proceed towards building a stronger and more resilient nation: inclusive development and engagement; institution-building anchored in social justice and the rule of law; and sustained partnership and appropriate bilateral and multilateral support to implement the Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030.

As we focus on this nationally-owned and nationally-driven plan at this implementation meeting, and given the magnitude of the task that still remains to sustain the gains already made by this young nation, I call on all our development partners to prioritize support for Timor-Leste's development objectives. With the proper support, Timor-Leste's journey towards sustainable peace, democracy, and development can be an inspirational example for all.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Priorities to Advance Timorese Development

The second issue on which I would like to focus is the need for more inclusive economic growth and job generation. To promote inclusive development, social cohesion, and shared prosperity, we need to further focus and invest in the areas where vulnerable people live and where they work, as well as in the skills and assets which they possess. We need to support them through mechanisms such as financial inclusion, whilst reducing the prices of the essential goods and services which they consume.

This means strengthening investment and support for the achievement of Timor-Leste's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in the areas of housing; water and sanitation; health and nutrition; quality education; women's equality and empowerment; as well as in the physical and social infrastructure for rural areas to be better able to access markets and development services. I know that the United Nations Country Team and our development partners are already supporting these priorities, and I look forward to learning how I may facilitate their work in these areas, in close collaboration with the Timorese government and civil society.

With 75 per cent of the Timorese population living in rural areas, we must particularly prioritize the needs of rural communities and agricultural development, with a special focus on rural women. It will also be critical to invest in the productivity and value-addition of agribusiness, as well as small and medium size businesses (SMEs) in rural infrastructure and food security. We need to generate increased employment and job opportunities, so that more people, including youth, can engage in jobs and productively contribute to the achievements of the country. In this connection, it is also important to support basic vocational skills development, so that more Timorese communities can take advantage of the construction and infrastructure agenda of the country.

At the same time, as mentioned earlier, we need to invest in the youth in both urban and rural areas. Timor-Leste has one of Asia's youngest populations, with 70 per cent under the age of 30. This means generating employment and jobs that can utilize and capitalize on the creative energy of the young, thereby unlocking a potential of the country.

Productive, quality jobs, that can provide income security and assets for people, require investment in the building of human capabilities for development for the economies of the future that can deliver better lives for all. In other words, investing in long-term sustainable and inclusive development.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sustainable Resource Use

The third issue which I would like to address is that of sustainable resource use, and converting natural resources into development assets. Timor-Leste is one of the most petroleum-reliant nations in our region, but at the same time financial revenues from the oil reserves in the Timor Sea have grown from US\$1.8 billion in 2007 to US\$13 billion this year. By wisely establishing systems to use these funds to support development across generations, the Government has done much already to secure future growth. Combined with high global fuel prices and public expenditure, we have seen strong annual economic growth averaging about 11 per cent, however the rising inflation which has also emerged is a risk that must be managed.

Timor-Leste still lacks a functioning productive sector that can supply enough basic inputs, and the imports of goods and services have therefore continued to grow. This is occurring concurrently with persistent unemployment.

These are large challenges, but they also present opportunities to further strengthen and build durable economic foundations that diversify the economic base, and to target sectors such as agri-business, fisheries, tourism, and petrochemicals that can generate increased employment and also substitute for some of the imported goods especially in the area of food security.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite being one of the youngest nations, Timor-Leste has already contributed to regional and global development.

As the Chair of the G7+, you have championed peace-building and state-building not only in your own country but in fragile states around the world.

As observers in the Pacific Islands Forum, and organizers of the Pacific Consultation on post-2015 development, in Dili this year (as part of the Development for All Conference), you have deepened your relationship with the Pacific island nations, supporting ocean economies, and their call for more people- and climate-centered development.

With Minister Pires as a member of the United Nations Secretary-Generals High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, you have made sure that the voices of fragile states are heard through the Dili Consensus and that nobody will be left behind.

With His Excellency the Prime Minister as this year's Chair of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, of 62 countries, he will be working with us to shape a resilient Asia-Pacific that is more inclusive and sustainable. In this role, he also helped to launch our Asia-Pacific regional campaign for Zero Hunger.

Simply put, Timor-Leste is already a valuable part of the fabric of South-East Asia standing at the crossroads between Asia and the Pacific. In the next phase of its development journey, it will be even more important for Timor-Leste to get as much sustained support as possible, from our region and beyond, to help ensure its continued contributions to regional and global development.

I see my role as helping to bring the region's expertise, assets, and assistance to the country, which will be important to support Timor-Leste's application for membership in ASEAN, and to help promote a better understanding of the needs and opportunities of Timor-Leste as it seeks to further integrate into this dynamic region.

It is commendable to see the efforts being made by Timor-Leste to work towards closer cooperation with its regional neighbors, to help shape the future of shared regional prosperity, based on social equity and sustainability. I am ready to do all that I can to mobilize resources and talents from the region, including the private sector, from the UN and our development partners, to support this development journey.

While humbly sharing these messages, I am primarily here at this meeting to listen, to learn, and to hear your views on how my role can add value to the country and the people of Timor-Leste, in this development phase of its transformation.

Together we can forge an alliance that can seize the opportunities of growing together towards a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable region.

I thank you.