

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT FRANCISCO GUTERRES LÚ OLO ON THE STATE OF EMERGENCY TO THE PEOPLE OF TIMOR-LESTE - Presidência da República de Timor-Leste



Presidential Palace, 27 march 2020

Beloved people of Timor-Leste!

Every day we hear news about the number of deaths in other countries caused by COVID-19. I'm talking about countries with very advanced healthcare systems, such as Italy, Spain, France, the United States, and others. Although these countries have been very attentive to the threat of COVID-19, their restrictive measures arrived too late. These countries have failed in terms of their restrictive measures.

Experts say that prevention is the most effective defensive weapon against COVID-19. It is urgent that we take preventive measures to stop the spread of the disease in our country.

On 21 March, the acting Minister of Health announced in a press conference that there was already a confirmed case of COVID-19 in Timor-Leste.

Upon hearing the news, our people, very conscientiously and on their own initiative, took measures to protect themselves from COVID-19 and prevent it from spreading in our country. Today, there is less movement in the streets of Dili. There are far fewer people in public places.

On 24 March, following a papal decree, the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste began suspending all eucharistic services and asked its congregation members to attend Mass on television or radio and pray at home. Other institutions, non-governmental and private organizations, stores have already started implementing preventive measures and rules. Schools, universities and sport activities were temporarily shut down.

I praise these institutions' and our citizens' efforts to reduce the movement of people and avoid activities that involve crowds.

Dear friends,

Any one of us can fall victim to this powerful enemy, an invisible enemy which does not discriminate on the basis of gender, age, economic status, religion, race or ethnicity, nationality, whether you come from a country with cold or warm climate, developed or not, large or small. The novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is highly contagious and rapidly spreading. Once a person is infected, they must take care of themselves and ensure that they don't transmit the virus to another person. The spread is rapid in environments that entail clusters of people – such as in familial, recreational, and professional settings. Being in good health does not mean not being infected. Respiratory secretions, expelled when an infected person sneezes or coughs, transmit the virus to those around, so it's important to maintain a social distance. The WHO recommends keeping a minimum distance of two meters.

I call for non-discrimination against people who are infected with the novel coronavirus or have similar symptoms. Our health services already have the means to isolate and treat them. Let us also not discriminate against those who have recently returned to Timor-Leste from countries with active novel coronavirus transmission. Quarantine has been decreed as a preventive measure for all citizens, Timorese or foreigners alike, who return to the country with government authorization. The fact that they are in quarantine does not mean that they are sick. If the test is negative for COVID-19, those citizens will be able to return to their regular lives.

No one is immune, so in order to succeed, it is our duty to support the work of the government and support one another.

In many countries, this disease has spread on a large scale. In Italy many priests died. Many doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, who are responsible for taking care of the sick, are infected. If they are sick, who takes care of them? We need to think about this issue in order to avoid a situation where we lose control of the disease.

We are a small country, with an equally small population! We have already lost many people during our national liberation struggle. We cannot lose any more. People are our country's most precious asset. The greatest wealth of Timor-Leste is our people!

We can prevent infection and avoid the risk of death if we are careful and learn to take care of others, especially the elderly and the most vulnerable.

Dear friends! Beloved People of Timor-Leste!

This disease is already in Timor-Leste, with only one positive case confirmed. However, the patient consciously looked for help from health professionals. The government promptly took some measures to prevent this patient from transmitting the virus.

We have created quarantine units to monitor all those arriving in Timor-Leste from affected countries. Some hotels have been turned into quarantine centres. We have a dedicated isolation unit and a treatment unit. Doctors from different medical specialties have joined forces and are working together to further the work of the inter-ministerial team and the WHO. Television, radio and other media have been teaching us how to protect ourselves from this disease, but we must bring information to each and every *suco and aldeia in Timor-Leste*.

I call on our people to let the government teams, with the support of the World Health Organization, do their work. We must all work together to win this great war. This is everyone's fight.

I will soon visit, alongside the Prime Minister and Timorese and WHO experts, the quarantine and isolation facilities that the government of Timor-Leste has been preparing.

Dear friends,

Timor-Leste was one of the last countries to report confirmed cases of coronavirus infection. We have learnt from those countries that put an immediate and successful response into action.

This is why the government asked me, as President of the Republic, to enact the procedures required to expand the powers of the state in the fight against this great enemy. After receiving the government's request for a declaration of a state of emergency, following the constitutional requirements, I sent a letter to the president of the National Parliament, unambiguously

justifying why the country needs the state of emergency. The National Parliament has very conscientiously responded favourably to that request.

Beloved people of Timor-Leste!

I declare the state of emergency to avoid a public calamity caused by COVID-19. The Constitution allows for a state of emergency to be declared in case of public calamity. The state of emergency is declared after obtaining prior authorisation from National Parliament. I do so with full responsibility, as President of the Republic, to protect our citizens and to prevent COVID-19 from destroying one of us, our people, and our country.

From 28 March at 00:00 until 26 April 2020 at 23:59, Timor-Leste will be in a state of emergency, to allow the government to take and implement certain measures. This implies the limitation or suspension of some of the rights, freedoms, and guarantees provided for in the Constitution. This doesn't mean we will lose those rights! It will be suspended or limited to defend a major interest – the lives of the People, our lives and the lives of our families.

I ask the people to accept these measures peacefully and respectfully and to support the teams working in the field.

Some activities will be interrupted; others will continue to the degree that they are essential to our lives. The government can ban gatherings, demonstrations, and social events, limit the circulation of people and other activities that entail crowds due to the high risk of contagion.

Beloved people of Timor-Leste!

Today, as during our national liberation struggle, we Timorese must work together to fight this enemy, i.e. COVID-19. Together, we must support the government in implementing effective measures to prevent this virus from spreading further and thereby protect our people! It is important that we continue to strengthen the government's efforts!

I ask the political parties, the leaders, all the cadres and members of the political parties to put aside the political differences and give hands in the fight against this disease. As Timorese we all have to reflect on what can happen in the next days, in this difficult situation. With the permission of National Parliament, I declared the State of Emergency, giving a very clear sign of institutional solidarity in this fight to defend our People. On the other hand, even being a small country, Timor-Leste gives its combatant international solidarity in the joint struggle against this disease COVID – 19, an enemy of humanity.

The specific measures to be adopted during the state of emergency will be defined by the government, with the support of all bodies of sovereignty. The success of the government depends on the collaboration of each and every one of us.

This is everyone's fight. Together, we will beat COVID-19 because of our organised know-how, yielded by one people with a unified will. To live in health and with all our freedoms, but also as responsible citizens who are guided by the values of love and respect for one another, in our free and independent Timor-Leste.

Let us together combat the novel coronavirus! Let us all together protect ourselves, our families and our People.

Thank you very much!