



PRESIDÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA

*Timor-Leste:
The Decade of Peace and Prosperity*

Remarks by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
President José Ramos-Horta
At the 13th Session of the Human Rights Council
Palais des Nations

Geneva, 11th March 2010

**Mr. President,
Mme High Commissioner,
Rapporteurs,
Ambassadors,
Human Rights Defenders,
Members of Civil Society**

This is my first address to this august body since its establishment in 2006. The best contribution each of us, National Leaders, can make towards advancing the cause of human rights, collective and individual freedoms and dignity, is to promote the respect for these rights in our own countries.

Most constitutions enshrine the universal values of the sanctity of human life, individual freedoms and dignity, the right to life, freedom from fear and torture, the right to freedom of expression and worship.

In addressing our National Parliament on International Human Rights Day, 10th December 2009, I said:

As we mark International Human Rights Day, I want to share with you some thoughts and reflections on the situation in our country, where we are today.

Have we given our people their most valuable human right, the right to peace, the right to live in one's town, village, home, in complete freedom, the right to walk down our streets, without fear, in complete tranquility?

Without conditions of real peace, no one can enjoy the most basic political and civil rights or economic, social and cultural rights.

Without real peace, we cannot fully implement the rights enshrined in our Constitution and in International Conventions concerning Child and Women's Rights.

Without real peace, we cannot progress on economic rights, rights to employment and housing, rights to adequate education and health and the right to food.

We can be very proud that we have one of the best Constitutions in the world and consistent with the principles and provisions of our Constitution we ratified all seven major International Human Rights Conventions.

Our Constitution bans Death Penalty and the maximum prison sentence is 25 years. We do not have life sentence.

We do not have prisoners of conscience or political prisoners. Our Media is completely free.

While the vast majority of our people profess Catholicism, no minority religious groups allege discrimination or exclusion even when some foreign religious sects proliferating now in our country have dubious authority in matters of faith.

We have made progress in giving a strong voice to our women. In the National Parliament, the Executive Branch and in the Judiciary, there are significant numbers of women in policy-making and decision making positions.

About 30% of deputies in our National Parliament are women. The average in the European Union is 18%.

We must do more at home, in Government and in our National Parliament to combat domestic violence and discrimination against women, and forever eliminate all forms of violence in our communities and in our homes through appropriate education and legislation that protect and punish all forms of domestic violence against women and children.

But peace is the single most important human right that the State and national leaders must strive to provide to everyone; we must build a country, a society where the culture of non-violence and of peace, of non-discrimination and inclusion, has gained roots.

The model society is the one that is generous, non-discriminatory, inclusive, that cares about the poor, elderly, handicapped; a model society is one that embraces the poor and the persecuted who flee tyranny and extreme poverty and land on our shores; a model society of God is one that loves and embraces HIV victims or those afflicted with this centuries-old illness called leprosy.

Mr. President, Mme Commissioner, Excellencies:

Our commitment to the advancement of women goes beyond our national boundaries. Recently, Timor-Leste submitted the name of Mdm. Maria Helena Lopes de Jesus Pires, as its candidate for CEDAW Committee. Mdm. Helena Pires has an in-depth understanding of issues related to women through her exposure to a wide range of position she has held at the National Parliament, the UN system, Government and with Civil Society Organizations.

Mdm. Helena Pires is a respected professional with fine human qualities and strong commitment to advance women's rights. We believe that her association with the CEDAW committee could be very valuable.

We have recovered from the 2006 crisis. Our people are now enjoying three years of peace and robust economic recovery.

Dili is a booming town. After years of stagnation or slow growth our economy registered a real 12.7% growth in 2008 and 14% growth in 2009. Our economy will continue to grow in 2010 driven by public and private sector investments in individual homes, small business, family agriculture, and large public investments in the power sector and roads. Expenditure on education and health remains very high.

In spite of the world financial crisis, our finances are sound and we continue to manage our modest resources with prudence.

There is renewed faith in the political leadership and in the institutions - according to an independent survey conducted a year ago by the International Republican Institute which gave the Government very high marks with the Prime Minister topping almost 80% of approval rate; the F-FDTL and PNTL received very significant marks of around 80% as well.

On the justice sector, we have been unfairly criticized by some fringe elements in this amorphous international community, an “international community” that is invoked time and again whenever some people want to bestow on themselves a measure of world authority in regurgitating ready-made clichés or academic jargon on justice.

One charge against me, is that I have some flaws in my heart as I issue too many pardons for individuals convicted of serious crimes.

The same fringe foreign society criticized us when in August 2009 the sovereign national authorities of my country decided, upon medical recommendation, to hand-over to the authorities of the neighboring country, one of their citizens who had been indicted for serious crimes in 1999 in my country.

When the said element was a “guest” at our neighbor’s embassy in Dili for almost two weeks, we were anticipating some form of mass protest or at least some candle light vigil since we had been told by the fringe external society that there is widespread anger in our country about the perception of impunity for past crimes.

As it turned out, and not surprisingly, there was not a single soul lighting a candle in protest at the gates of the said embassy where the alleged mass murderer had been sheltered while awaiting medical evacuation.

Some politicians politicized the case; but politicians are supposed to politicize everything. Our Prime Minister was subject to a Censure Motion. With much grace and finesse he endured a whole day and evening of repetitive questions in our National Parliament.

Our people were transfixed to the TV screens, their ears glued to the radio, as they followed the daylong harangue in our National Parliament, and were deeply impressed by PRIME MINISTER XANANA GUSMAO’S oratory and eloquence in explaining to the nation the Reasons of State for our policies of reconciliation and magnanimity.

The victims demand acknowledgement of the truth, recognition of their suffering and a measure of individual or collective assistance. The State does have the obligation to respond to such basic and yet very profound demands and this what we have been attempting to do since 2002 and have done much with the Comissao de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliacao (CAVR) and the Joint Indonesia-Timor Leste’s Commission on Truth and Friendship (CTF) .

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Life is not so simple, there is no black and white; in each country and society, in the rich North and less rich south, there is an expectation for justice, for the rule of law, for respect for human rights and human dignity.

But everywhere where there is a violent conflict, we must first create the space and conditions for dialogue in order to bring about a cessation of armed conflict, followed by the lengthy process of healing, reconciliation, employment, poverty eradication, etc and etc. And in the efforts to bring about peace between long-standing rival communities, often we have to compromise on justice.

While the notion of blind pursuit of justice might sound heroic and politically correct, the blind pursuit of justice without regard to the complex and often fragile balance in conflict societies may ignite new tensions and conflicts and derail the entire peace process.

International tribunals were never created as part of or following the negotiated end of a conflict; they were and are always created by the victorious warriors to try those defeated in the battlefield.

In the last few decades some European countries, namely Spain and Portugal, to cite some examples, experienced similar dilemmas in the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Spaniards and Portuguese gave us sober lessons of wisdom and magnanimity in not sending to jail every senior and junior collaborator of their hated regimes, Franco and Salazar, respectively.

South Africa is a more recent inspiring example of how national leaders and our societies address the complex legacies of the past in creative and dignified ways that do justice to the victims, reconcile the divided communities, heal the wounds, and move on.

We are not doing differently in Timor-Leste, treading complex issues with care, prudence, always bearing in mind that we must reconcile our people, heal the wounds of the past, honor and assist the victims, moving small steps at a time in building democracy and the rule of law, and a durable peace.

On this and other complex and sensitive matters I never camouflaged my views from our people. They know where I stand on this sublime matter.

I will conclude my remarks with references to some international issues, the situations in Myanmar and in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), Western Sahara and Palestine.

Myanmar and North Korea stand out in Asia and indeed in the world among the gravest human rights crisis.

While the international community is transfixed by North Korean nuclear brinkmanship, there has been less attention paid to the horrific gulag that imprisons an entire nation and condemns it to extreme deprivation.

The military regime in Myanmar seems determined to pursue a course that will only jeopardise any chance of the country moving forward.

While we do not wish to lecture anyone, based on our own rich and tragic experience, we believe that no amount force will ever suffice to quell a people's desire for freedom and sooner or later the parties in a dispute or conflict have to meet half-way and agree on a way-out of the conflict.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other pro-democracy leaders have shown remarkable patience, courage, moderation and wisdom in opting for dialogue in spite of the extraordinary violence and indignities inflicted upon them. We appeal to the elderly Myanmar generals to show wisdom, courage and humility and change course.

We are encouraged by the on-going mediation efforts by the Secretary-General in the search for a solution to the problem of Western Sahara. It has been more than three decades since the first Saharawis were forced into exile and into camps as refugees.

We appeal to the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts and remind him that it was the good-offices role of the Secretary-General that helped paved the way for ending the conflict in Timor-Leste.

The Palestinian tragedy began to unfold with the persecution of Jews in Europe, culminating with the Holocaust and the creation in 1949 of the State of Israel. And 60 years later the only people who are still paying for the legacies of a war and a Holocaust not of their making are the Palestinians.

For those in Palestine who have endured all forms of abuse but have refused to answer violence with violence, we bow to them. To those who out of desperation and anger have opted for violence, we urge them to learn with Mahatma Ghandi that there is a greater power than katuska rockets and suicide bombings, and that is the power of non-violence. Civil disobedience and non-violence, more than rockets, will emotionally tire out the mighty Israeli army and wake up the conscience of the Israeli society to this abominable situation.

And Palestine will be free. And Israel will be free and finally at peace with itself.

May God the Almighty and the Merciful Bless Us All.