

Timor-Leste: UN expert calls for inclusive and sustainable development

GENEVA (21 June 2012) – “Ensuring inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth is the most crucial challenge facing Timor-Leste today”, United Nations Special Rapporteur Magdalena Sepúlveda said Thursday during the presentation of her report* on her visit to Timor-Leste, at the Human Rights Council.

While recognizing Timor-Leste’s progress in tackling the challenge of state-building and development only ten years after independence, the Special Rapporteur warned that “a harsh reality of entrenched poverty and rising inequality hides behind rapid macroeconomic growth indicators”. She called on the State to concentrate its efforts on social and economic policies that ensure the enjoyment of human rights of the whole population such as access to justice, education, health care, water and sanitation.

Timor-Leste has quickly emerged as one of Asia Pacific’s fastest growing economies, primarily thanks to its oil and gas resources. However, around 40 per cent of the Timorese population still live below the poverty line and the country has one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in the world.

“I welcome the increase in budget allocation to social services, including health and education, adopted after my visit”, said Ms. Sepúlveda. “However, I remain concerned by the fact that the budget allocation to physical infrastructure is disproportionately high, at the expense of resources for desperately-needed health services and quality education provision.” Investing in health and education is an investment in the future of Timor-Leste and is critical for sustainable, people-centred development, the Special Rapporteur emphasised.

Land regime reform remains a complex issue for Timor-Leste, which has severe effects on access to land, housing and livelihoods for persons living in poverty. The Special Rapporteur therefore urged the Government to adopt a clear and stable legal framework on land titling, ensuring its compliance with international human rights standards and obligations.

Timor-Leste is rightly proud of its linguistic diversity. In this regard, Ms. Sepúlveda urged the Government to ensure that lack of proficiency in one of the official languages is not a barrier to the enjoyment of any human rights, especially access to justice, education and access to information.

The Special Rapporteur also called for increased efforts towards a more inclusive decision-making process, highlighting the current concentration of decision-making powers in Dili. “Development should be a “bottom up” process in which the population can meaningfully and effectively participate in the establishment of national priorities” she said.

(*) See the full report:

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A.HRC.20.25.Add.1_En.PDF

ENDS

Magdalena Sepúlveda was appointed as the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights in May 2008 by the UN Human Rights Council. She is independent from any government or organization. Learn more, visit: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx>

UN Human Rights, Country Page – Timor-Leste:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/TPIndex.aspx>

For further information and **media requests**, please contact:

Geneva: Leonardo Castilho (+41 22 917 98 61 / srextremepoverty@ohchr.org)

For **media inquiries** related to other UN independent experts:

Xabier Celaya, UN Human Rights – Media Unit (+ 41 22 917 9383 / xcelaya@ohchr.org)