



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE TO
THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN GENEVA

Oral Response

by Ambassador Joaquim da Fonseca

to the Report on Country Visit to Timor-Leste

by Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty

Ms. Madalena Sepúlveda-Carmona

20th Session of the Human Rights Council

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Madam President,

Timor-Leste thanks the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty for the Country Visit conducted in November 2011. We appreciate the views exchanged by the Special Rapporteur during her meetings with various Government officials.

Since the Government of Timor-Leste started to take charge of the planning and implementation of development in the country in 2002, merely ten (10) years ago, many advice and criticisms have been voiced by development critiques. They are highly sophisticated, some were drawn from experience in conducting development, and many were results of desk work inspired by ideals from development textbooks. Therefore, it has been Timor-Leste's intention to hear a more pragmatic, realistic and practical human rights oriented views from the Special Rapporteur on how Timor-Leste can best guarantee the protection, promotion and realization of human right of its citizen still living in extreme poverty, based on an independent assessment of development policies and practices in Timor-Leste.

Most of the shortcomings identified in the report have been openly acknowledged by the Government of Timor-Leste in various official documents, including those cited ⁱⁿ ~~by~~ the report of the Special Rapporteur. It would be inaccurate, however, to depict the situation in Timor-Leste almost as a deliberate act of the Government to further marginalize the vulnerable segment of our society, or that it is a result of neglect due to lack of understanding of human rights, as expressed in paragraph 16 of the Addendum to ^{the} report.

The Timorese understanding of, and commitment to, human rights is best expressed in the Constitution of the Republic, which recognizes guarantees for the protection, promotion and fulfillment of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights as well as Civil and Political Rights, reflected in the International Human Rights Standards. The implementation of these Constitutional guarantees in Timor-Leste, however, is not simple in practice. For almost every single human right provided for in the Constitution, a new institution, and a new legislation or policy, or program, needed to be put in place upon restoration of independence in 2002. Successive governments of Timor-Leste have made the efforts to meet this challenge, giving equal attention to all human rights. There are many competing

priorities and challenges, but options are few. Choices ^{had} have to be made, and they have been made carefully.

Extreme poverty is still a major obstacle for the enjoyment of human rights by many Timorese, and we are firmly committed to remove this obstacle. As a short term and immediate response to the needs of the most vulnerable citizens, different schemes were put in place to provide social benefits to former combatants of the liberation, the elderly, citizens with disabilities, and single female-headed households. Scholarships are also provided for children belonging to economically vulnerable families. Effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of these schemes are needed, including by addressing challenges related to identification and verification of beneficiaries (same names, same village, no clear date of birth), accessibility (not only geographical, but also due to the high level of illiteracy – this places an enormous pressure on the limited staff of the relevant Ministry), and the monitoring of the implementation of the schemes, including to ensure specific controls to curb corruption.

A more comprehensive and long term policy for social protection is needed. An Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the Formulation of Social Protection Policy was established to look into this matter. The Working Group is currently conducting studies and public consultations to formulate a universal social protection policy for Timor-Leste. Once finalized, this policy will provide a more solid basis for the protection of the most vulnerable segment of the Timorese society.

We share the views of the Special Rapporteur that the long term efforts to reduce poverty shall be based on inclusive growth and development. Currently, more than 50% of wage employment is provided by the public sector, including through the establishment of new institutions essential for the functioning of the state. The concentration of most of these institutions in the Capital city of the country explains the seemingly inequality in incomes between the capital and the rural areas. To ensure a more equitable, inclusive and decentralized development, the Government of Timor-Leste has made agriculture and rural enterprise development a priority. To support the development in these priority areas, the Government has allocated a substantial percentage in the State Budget for infrastructure development. The Report raises questions about the imbalance in the allocation of funds for infrastructure and for social programs. It is important to understand that this fund will

finance the construction of new road network, ports, irrigations facilities, power plants and telecommunication networks. Increased rural and rural-urban connectivity with quality road network will not only facilitate greater market access for agriculture products, but also will increase the access of the rural population to other services such as health and education. The distribution of a steady supply of electricity to the rural areas will provide more opportunities for rural industry development, including home industries.

Communities' participation in the design and implementation of inclusive development policies are also foreseen for the near future. In 2013, Timor-Leste will conduct the elections for Municipal Assemblies. Municipalities will have competence to plan, implement and monitor Integrated Municipal Development. The establishment of Municipalities will formalize the existing competence of the Village Councils to gather the views of the communities on development policies, ^{to be} ~~are~~ integrated into the process of Municipal Development Plans, and that these local representative bodies can monitor the implementation of development programs in each village, This new arrangement is another step forward in Timor-Leste's commitment to decentralization and participatory development, and will ensure that development programs provide a more targeted response to the needs of rural communities.

While certain premises in the report could have taken the current reality of Timor-Leste into account, we appreciate the analysis and recommendations of the Special Rapporteur. Timor-Leste will give them serious consideration, and where practicable, use them to inform the process of review and reformulation of relevant policies.

Timor-Leste remains committed to a the efforts to alleviate extreme poverty through various development activities in general, as well as through targeted social policies, and ,welcomes a continuing exchange of views with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty and other UN mechanisms ^{on} the future.