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### Viewing cable 08DILI229, LET'S LIFT THE TRAVEL WARNING FOR TIMOR-LESTE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification
08DILI229	2008-09-10 10:07	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

FOR EAP/MTS, DS, AND CA/OCS/ACS (SCHEFFMAN)

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: ASEC CASC PO AS TT  
SUBJECT: LET'S LIFT THE TRAVEL WARNING FOR TIMOR-LESTE

¶1. (U) Summary. Embassy Dili believes that conditions in Timor-Leste now warrant revocation of the Department's Travel Warning, last revised in July. Over the course of 2008, immediate threats to political and social stability have been eliminated or reduced. There have been no major instances of communitarian violence in 2008, there is no known terrorist threat, and Timor-Leste's external relations with Indonesia and its other neighbors are good. The few large demonstrations held in 2008 did not get out of control or endanger bystanders. Foreigners are very seldom victims of violent crime. Appropriate advice concerning Dili's petty street crime can be included in the "Safety and Security" chapter of "Country Specific Information" for Timor-Leste at the travel.state.gov website. End summary.

¶2. (U) Embassy Dili recommends that the Department lift its July 21, 2008 Travel Warning for Timor-Leste. Although street crime is an issue, and there remains a potential for political instability and communitarian conflict, post regards Timor-Leste as generally safe for Amcit travelers. In lieu of a Travel Warning, necessary safety and security information can be provided on the travel.state.gov website. The following factors have influenced post's conclusions:

Immediate Sources of Political Tension Reduced Or Removed

¶3. (U) A band of fewer than 20 military dissidents, at large since the 2006 political crisis, carried out an unsuccessful assassination attempt against President Jose Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao on February 11, 2008. The rebels' leader, Major Alfredo Alves Reinado, was killed in the attack. While alive, Reinado provided a rallying point for some disaffected political elements, youth, and a group of disgruntled ex-military and veterans of the resistance struggle known as "the petitioners." However, his violent and unforeseen acts against the country's leaders shocked and alienated these erstwhile admirers, and his death eliminated him as a source of further destabilization. The remnants of his band surrendered peacefully to the authorities and have been in custody since May.

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*courage is contagious*

¶4. (U) Reinado's death and the arrest of his followers led to the resolution of the Government of Timor-Leste's (GOTL) conflict with the petitioners, thereby removing another immediate source of instability. While they were at large or camped at the Aitarak Laran site in Dili, this group of about 600 men and their families presented a potential threat to security. Following the surrender of Reinado's followers, the petitioners became amenable to a settlement. Over the past several months, virtually all the petitioners have accepted GOTL payouts, have disbanded their encampment in Dili, and no longer pose a security threat.

¶5. (U) The GOTL has also recently made significant progress in resettling nearly half of the 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were driven from their homes during the 2006 political crisis. According to the Ministry of Social Solidarity, a total of 23 camps have been closed and more than 6500 IDP families have received a recovery or a reintegration package under the GOTL's resettlement strategy. IDP camps in Dili were sources of low-level criminal activity, sites of political agitation, and a public health menace. Over the last few months, the compensation packages, in combination with the return of relative political stability and reconciliation efforts in the IDPs' hometowns, have led to the evacuation of Dili's largest and most volatile camps, including those located at Nicolau Lobato Airport, Jardim (Dili Port), National Hospital, and Sional (World Bank). Evacuation of the Dom Bosco camp is underway; when this is completed, 24 of the country's 51 camps will be closed, reducing a major potential source of social and political instability.

¶6. (SBU) The level of partisan political confrontation has also subsided. The August 2007 political violence was in fueled in part by hard-line supporters of the opposition FRETILIN party, who rejected the new government formed after elections in late June. Since then, FRETILIN has ceased agitating for the government's ouster, refrained from incendiary rhetoric, and for the time being has settled into the role of Parliamentary opposition.

Dili Is Less Volatile  
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¶7. (U) Although the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) remains a weak and undisciplined force, security in Dili has improved in some important regards. During political violence in the 2006 crisis and in August 2007, youth gangs took

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advantage of the disorder to engage in rock fights and shoot metal darts, endangering motorists and passers-by. However, following the February 11 assassination attempts, imposition of a strict curfew and creation of an effective joint command between the PNTL and Defense Forces of Timor-Leste (F-FDTL) prevented a recurrence of these episodes. In fact, street crime in all forms dropped off radically during the State of Siege and subsequent State of Emergency in the weeks following February 11.

¶8. (U) The effectiveness of the emergency measures seems to have influenced conditions subsequent to the lifting of the State of Emergency on May 8. Statistical tracking of criminal activity conducted by the UN Police Mission in Timor-Leste indicates a reduction in several categories compared with the same period in ¶2007. These figures show a decline in the incidence of disorderly behavior, arson, group fighting, and homicide. The number of assaults remained constant, as did the number of overall arrests.

¶9. (U) Another factor influencing the security climate in Dili was the December 2007 creation of the PNTL's Dili Task Force, a rapid reaction unit formed in response to an upsurge in crime in Dili last year. Although the Task Force has earned a reputation for brutality, its actions have met with the approval of many Dili residents for ruthlessly clamping down on gang and thug activity. Gang activity may also be curtailed by a truce signed on August 28 between PSHT and 77, Dili's largest martial arts groups.

Australian, Portuguese Assessments

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Â¶10. (SBU) As a basis for comparison, it is relevant to consider travel advisories prepared by the Governments of Australia and Portugal, each of which is responsible for sizeable expat communities in Timor-Leste. Australia's assessment of the security environment is very similar to the Department's July 21 travel advisory, and recommends that Australians "reconsider" the need to travel to Timor-Leste. However, its equities in Timor-Leste are different from ours, and the GOA will probably not relax its advisory for two reasons. First, because of the size of the Australian community (about 1,500, not including 750 military personnel) any sudden deterioration of conditions would create greater demands on the GOA than those that the USG would face. Secondly, the GOA recalls 2006-7 incidents between Timorese and the predominantly Australian International Stabilization Force (ISF). Although the ISF is a highly disciplined force and there have been no tensions in recent months, the GOA is likely concerned by a scenario in which an incident between the ISF and Timorese sparks more widespread anti-Australian sentiments or actions. Post believes these considerations are of limited applicability to USG decision-making.

Â¶11. (U) The Government of Portugal, by contrast, assesses the political situation as "calm" and "stable." The GOP merely provides its approximately 1,500 nationals with advice against becoming victims of crime, and urges them to abstain from activities of a political nature.

Caveat

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Â¶12. (U) In short, Timor-Leste still has latent political and social conflicts similar to those in many other developing countries; these could again escalate into civil disorder if triggered by unforeseeable events. However, post believes that major factors contributing to the violence of 2006-7 have diminished to the extent that a special travel warning is no longer needed. We do not downplay the importance of sound advice to U.S. travelers to Timor-Leste. While petty crime (particularly purse snatchings, burglaries, and vehicle break-ins) remains a low-level but persistent problem, foreigners are rarely victims of violent crime. Gun violence is practically unheard of. By any objective measure, AmCits are safer in Dili than in Washington, D.C. Relevant safety and security information for travelers should be included in the "Safety and Security" chapter of "Country Specific Information" for Timor-Leste at the travel.state.gov website.  
RECTOR