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Viewing cable 05VATICAN557, EAST TIMOR: VATICAN EXAMINES ROLE OF CHURCH, BISHOPS

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05VATICAN557	2005-12-15 12:09	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embass

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of th original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000557

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE (JLARREA), EAP/IET

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2015

TAGS: PREL KIRF PGOV PINR ID VT TT

SUBJECT: EAST TIMOR: VATICAN EXAMINES ROLE OF CHURCH, BISHOPS

REF: VATICAN 473, VATICAN 471, STATE 172079, JAKARTA 006805

CLASSIFIED BY: Fleur Cowan, Political Officer, POL, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

 ¶1. (C) This is the first of two cables on the East Timorese Catholic church viewed from Rome six months after the May protests incited by Bishops Basilio Nascimento and Alberto Ricardo da Silva. This first message will focus on the Holy See's official position, as laid out by Holy See East Timor country director Luis Montemayor. The second cable will present a contrasting and more critical view of the East Timorese bishops from another Vatican-based source. Montemayor is concerned that the bishops continue to be involved in political battles with the Fretilin government, but feels that if they don't go as far as to incite demonstrations similar to the ones in May, their actions are acceptable. Montemayor hopes that the two East Timorese bishops will be more prudent in their public statements, but feels it is important that the Church continues to be vocal in East Timor. Montemayor also encouraged contact between U.S. Embassy Dili and local Church leaders. End Summary.

The Holy See's View of the Bishops

 ¶2. (C) Holy See East Timor country director Luis Montemayor (protect) expressed alarm at some of Bishop Alberto Ricardo da Silva's statements against the government of East Timor during and since the May Church-led protests against the government decision to end religious instruction in public schools. "The Church should be a voice of the people, but it does not speak for all the people," Montemayor said, implying that Ricardo was attempting to do so. He said that after the May church-led protests against the government, "the church had been vocal, and thought it had won." In fact, Montemayor continued, "this is only the beginning." Though he might differ with some of Ricardo's statements and tactics, Montemayor underlined his belief that without an organized opposition party, the Church still had a role to play in East Timorese political dialogue.

Church Divided

 ¶3. (SBU) Montemayor feels that divisions within the Church over its role in political society have historical links to the conflict with Indonesia and the move to independence. He said the East Timorese clergy was divided in its support for

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independence and that there was "no common view of the Fretilin party." Montemayor told us some of the "best educated and trained church staff used to support Fretilin." He said that even now there was no consensus of opinion within the Church in favor of or against the current government.

Allegations of Corruption

¶4. (C) According to Montemayor, Bishops Basilio Nascimento and Alberto Ricardo da Silva are convinced that PM Mari Alkatieri leads a faction of "Mozambicans," East Timorese leaders that have returned from political exile in Mozambique, who are trying to limit the influence of the bishops and the Church. "The bishops think Alkatieri's faction is trying to push them into a corner," he explained. Montemayor added that the bishops were convinced that the government was corrupt and rife with nepotism and bribery. "The bishops think Akatieri's family is lining its own pockets," he concluded. Montemayor allows that these allegations might be exaggerated, but were perhaps not entirely off the mark. Still, as he has tried to explain to the bishops, "a bad government is better than no government at all." Montemayor also pointed out that while government bureaucrats in East Timor might be lacking in experience and education, the East Timorese Church was in a similar situation. Both institutions needed to mature, he suggested.

A New Same Diocese and a New Dili University?

¶5. (C) Montemayor mentioned the Holy See's planned creation of the new diocese of Same. He confirmed that the creation of this third East Timorese diocese had been in the works for some time, as according to canon law a local episcopal conference requires three dioceses. However, he emphasized that serious resource and staffing constraints remained before the diocese would become fully functional. The Same diocese must be economically self sufficient, and not a drain on the other two, he noted. In addition, he said it was hard to attract staff for the bishops, both locally because they don't have enough qualified local

priests, and internationally as there is no longer a close link between the Portuguese and the East Timorese churches. Montemayor said he explained these obstacles to the creation of a new diocese in his last meeting with FM Jose Ramos-Horta. Montemayor felt it could be "two months or two years" before administrative issues are addressed and the Vatican finds a bishop for Same.

¶6. (SBU) Montemayor mentioned the bishops' plan to create a university in Dili, and felt it was overly ambitious. "Maybe they could start a small university, but their plans are too grand," he said. According to Montemayor, "at the most they should start simply with departments of education, language and medicine." Commenting more broadly on education in East Timor, he praised the work of the Jesuits in the field, pointing out the order's great impact in East Timor.

Comment

¶7. (C) Montemayor expressed his thanks for Embassy Dili's role in calming tensions during the May protests, and encouraged contact between Embassy Dili and Church leaders. He said the bishops would welcome increased opportunity to present the diplomatic corps with its version of events, as opposed to the government version that is commonly heard. Montemayor has the impression that the bishops do not trust personnel from the UN mission in East Timor. End Comment.

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