



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO  
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MARITIME BOUNDARIES & g7+ EMINENT PERSON**

**9<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION  
“Unleashing the Full Potential of Civil Society”**

**Plenary Session 1: The Foundation – UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

*“Harvesting Human Rights for Independence and Democracy”*

**Western Sydney University  
Sydney, Australia  
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***Dr. Sev Ozdowski AM, Director of Equity and Diversity at Western Sydney University and Conference Convenor***

*Fellow speakers:*

***Professor Scott Holmes, Acting Vice Chancellor and President of Western Sydney University***

***Mr. Chris Moraitis PSM, Secretary of the Australian Government's Attorney General's Department***

***Ms. Cynthia Veliko, Regional Representative of the OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) Regional Office for South East Asia***

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers for hosting this event and for inviting me to participate. I would especially like to acknowledge my dear friend Dr. Sev Ozdowski, who is both a remarkable philanthropist and an exceptional host.

As you know, I represent a country that has endured serious human rights violations and that is now one of the world's youngest democracies. Sixteen years since the restoration of our independence, Timor-Leste is still in the process of building our nation and consolidating our State and, at the same time, as a way of learning, we are also paying close attention to all that is going on in the world around us.

We survived the years of resistance, hoping to find a new international order - as was proclaimed by many in those days - of solidarity over aggression, cooperation between nations, and the just treatment of people. And yet, today, we are living in troubled times, with real threats to global stability and increasing mistrust in the political and democratic institutions.

I understand that much of what we are asked to contribute towards a better world - such as safeguarding and promoting human rights in support of democracy, justice and tolerant and peaceful societies - is dependent on human nature itself.

And what is going on in today's world? Are human rights on the wane? Is democracy in crisis? What can we do to educate our societies, particularly our younger citizens, so as to have a culture based on human rights? What can we do to improve the very people, who, against their very nature, may opt for radicalization or extremism?

Unfortunately, in today's globalised world, we often see and hear speeches with dangerous repercussions - spewing hatred and inciting violence. We see and feel increasing contempt for others, for those who are different.... for minorities. Even countries that appear to have the most consolidated democracies are evolving in a manner that is frighteningly unequal, leaving behind those who need help the most. In these countries - often the main exporters of "expertise on human rights" - we also witness a dangerous rise in human rights violations: corruption, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, hatred, violence and many other deadly passions.

Messages by political leaders are manifesting feelings of mistrust and discrediting an international order that provides security and safety to the people: economic security, food security, environmental security and physical safety.

While safety and dignity are the cornerstones of human rights, the world today is dominated by fear and hatred. Increasing social conflicts drive societies towards crisis mode, and people, faced with instability, unemployment, violence and fear of others, fight against these perceived threats. We are seeing human beings united in fear, rising up and threatening the ideals of solidarity and cooperation.

We see millions of migrants flooding into Europe, looking for security and dignity, but being met by resistance, in one of the more recent and obvious examples of this sad reality. Tragically, we have seen many people - including children - drowned as they cross the Mediterranean Sea.

I was invited by a European Union Commission to speak to the Expo Milano in 2015, on the subject: 'Human rights, right to food, right to land ... what is missing?'

I addressed this question by referencing the migrants to Europe. What is missing is peace! These migrants, who had land in abundance, were fleeing from wars, which, in many cases, the world's great decision-makers were ironically promoting, in so called support of the establishment of democracy and human rights.

Let us look at the war in Iraq, promoted by many countries in the West...after more than a decade of war, with much devastation and suffering and...we have neither a sustainable democracy nor a human rights paradise. Let us look at Syria - the war is prolonged and maintained and divisionism continues. Let us look at Yemen - there was talk of peace at press conferences in the morning, but, in the afternoon, behind the scenes, billions of dollars' worth of arms deals are being signed bringing suffering, hunger, disease and homelessness to millions.

The 'Arab Spring', hailed by the West, was also not a magic wand for democracy and human rights.

I also represent a group of countries called the g7+, a voluntary association of countries affected by conflict and fragility that, today, encompasses 20-member States from Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean.

The g7+ was created in 2010, in Dili, to serve as a platform for its member States to achieve lasting peace and stability by promoting dialogue and reconciliation, advocating solutions adjusted to the reality of each country and facilitating the sharing of experiences. Voluntarism, solidarity and cooperation are the three key commitments that keep us united, despite our differences.

We are aware, however, that peace and the protection of human rights are not feasible in these countries until their leaders lead not by their egos, but by example, responsibly and with accountability, and until their people demand their governments place national interest above private interests.

Still, it must be recognised that conflicts in many of our countries are due to struggles for power and hegemony by more powerful nations. They are also due to the vested interests of large multinational corporations, which completely ignore the rights and liberties of the voiceless.

Afghanistan has been the victim of an endless cold war between the powers in the region, and now Yemen, and also Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic - a long and painful list of countries where colonisation, civil war, dictatorships, greed, and external interests have led the populations into misery and dependence, despite the high untapped potential in their lands and underneath their soils.

And the United Nations missions, in many of these cases, brings a costly, 'one-size-fits-all' policy which ignores the specific context of each country.

These are challenges that need a true response, and demands the involvement of each and every one of us.

Your Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen,

My people suffered a cruel oppression for twenty-four long years. What was it that kept us going? It was the collective dream by an entire people of independence, freedom and democratic ideals.

As we began reconstructing a country from the ashes, we met an even greater challenge of development, a challenge common to many under-developed countries: the construction of democratic institutions that support the true aspirations of our people; the proper response to the basic needs of the population, such as food, housing, health, education, and, last but not least, the construction of basic infrastructure.

Conflict affected countries, at critical points, may need an injection of funds to respond to their national demands – this can be a tool to install confidence and trust and to promote peace. But this is rarely forthcoming.

When I was the Chair of UNESCAP (the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), I noted with regret that the international community and the international financial institutions were unable to respond to the calls from many countries in need of funds, to respond to their specific national demands, or to develop their basic infrastructure.

The sad fact is, ladies and gentlemen, democratic principles by themselves do not feed or heal anyone. Democracy is but the means through which we can realise the aspiration of every human being, namely to live in safety and with dignity. This realisation cannot be imposed – it needs to be adapted to each context, while trusting the judgement of the population. As such, we have been building our own democratic experience, learning from our own mistakes and moving forward, doing our best to put an end to a mindset of conflict.

During this journey, we understood, in Timor-Leste, that we were but one million among hundreds of millions of people all over the world who yearn for peace, stability and dignity, but whose intrinsic fragility does not always allow for it.

Timor-Leste was also blessed with significant oil and gas reserves, not to mention our world-class coffee. Asserting our full sovereign rights is about more than just our political and economic independence. It also means ensuring that the sacrifices made by our people were not in vain and that future generations will have the dignity and development they deserve.

As such, after exhausting every attempt to bring Australia to the negotiating table, Timor-Leste initiated the first ever compulsory conciliation, under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to help us resolve our long-running maritime boundary dispute with Australia.

Initiating the process in April 2016, we signed the historic Maritime Boundary Treaty with Australia at the United Nations on 6 March this year. This Treaty not only enables us to consolidate our sovereignty, it also provides a model for the peaceful resolution of international disputes.

Following the signing of the Treaty, and as a way of exercising our right to stability and prosperity, we recently concluded an agreement with ConocoPhillips, which was willing to sell us its shares in Greater Sunrise. And, last week, we entered into a Purchase and Sale Agreement with Shell, which also was willing to sell its Greater Sunrise shares.

These investments represent a 56.6% stake in the Joint Venture. This is an important step that will allow us to bring a gas pipeline to Timor-Leste and, in doing so, benefit our people through the exploitation of our natural resources and the development of our country.

The United Nations conciliation process provides is with an important model, at a time when geopolitical tensions concerning maritime disputes are rising globally. The experience of Timor-Leste, as a small, fragile and developing country, that faced a large and powerful maritime neighbour, helped identify the need for support to developing countries to promote equal access to the international legal mechanisms for solving maritime disputes.

We are, therefore, discussing the proposal for an independent, international Trust Fund with several countries that share our vision. The Trust Fund would finance and facilitate legal and technical support for developing countries to settle maritime disputes. We are planning to formally launch this initiative next year, at the time of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNCLOS. Timor-Leste has already committed \$250,000 to kick-start the initiative.

Even though every nation is equal before the law, not every nation has access to the international legal system. We believe that when countries cooperate and act with solidarity, it is possible to do better, helping those who need it and thus bringing justice to every corner of the world. This is what defending and preserving human rights is all about.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Timor-Leste still has many challenges ahead in consolidating a democratic State.

With more than half our population under 20 years old, employment is a critical issue. Finding jobs for our youth – who often lack the necessary skills – is no easy task. Young people are the future of our nation, which is why their training and education are both our main focus and our main challenge!

Our strategy for addressing this - and our other key development issues - is outlined in our 2011-2030 Strategic Development Plan, which seeks to diversify the economy, develop our human capital and grow our country sustainably.

Step by step, we must also invest in the fight against political and civil illiteracy by our young people. We want to build a critical and responsible civil society that will monitor our democratic institutions and hold them to account. This role does not belong to the State alone! The State must guide its agencies, but it is for the political and social groups of the nation to guide their children and to instil in them hard work, a participative and responsible attitude, and an inclusive and democratic mindset.

Education in the area of human rights starts in our schools, in our workplaces...in other words, in every sphere of public and private life. This is the hope that democracy gives us...that it is possible to educate in freedom and foster a pluralism of ideas.

An independent assessment, conducted by The Economist magazine in 2017, found Timor-Leste to be the most democratic country in Southeast Asia. This assessment took into account electoral processes, freedoms, political participation, culture, and the manner in which agencies operate.

It is not entirely surprising we are regarded as the most democratic, given we earned independence, democracy and peace with great effort and sacrifice, and not too long ago!

Less than two decades ago, the vast majority of our people, in a magnificent display of democratic awareness, endured an atmosphere of intimidation and violence and marched to the polling booths to vote for independence. And yet today, some of the younger members of our population are starting to forget...they forget the sacrifices their parents and grandparents made so that Timor-Leste could be independent. They forget that living in democracy does not replace the duty that each and every citizen has to their country. Indeed, abstention has been rising over the last few elections, particularly by those who have grown-up in an independent Timor-Leste.

As such, it is critical we have more historical education about political systems, particularly for young people who perhaps never experienced contempt for their rights, who did not know autocratic contexts and who never lived under antidemocratic regimes.

We need our young people to have greater political participation, greater knowledge and greater engagement in democratic processes. It is essential to instil in everyone, from a young age, that we all have a role to play in promoting individual and collective rights and liberties and, more importantly, have obligations to uphold those same collective rights and liberties. John F Kennedy said: "*Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country!*" I would add, ask what you can do for humanity!

Our new common goal is to educate! And I am talking about education that is humanist and focused on acceptance, equality and respect; education that goes well beyond formal education and that is adjusted to reality. Education that seeks freedom and justice for everyone, rather than being manipulated to protect the interests of a few. Universities should play a role in the education of citizenship, rather than just vocation - a good citizen of a country can and should be a good citizen of the world!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Democracy feeds on human rights. Human rights feed on acceptance and inclusion of those who are different or think differently. It is education that can enable every nation in the world to be and to think in freedom, in justice and in peace.

Such an education must take into account the global changes over the last few decades and it must address domestic and global issues. Education must contribute to renewing institutions and political mindsets, to making institutions work for their people. And with an international view, education should foster a better way for countries to engage regionally and globally, including with a greater respect for international law.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If the transformation of politics into a business kills democracy, then economic and military supremacy threatens the rights and the very existence of humanity.

The common challenge, for all of us, that will decide the fate of humanity, is to make a positive contribution towards a better future. It is possible to do better, both for others and for ourselves!

Each of us has an important individual and collective role to play towards the “*advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want*”, which was proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

Only then can we realise an old dream that, 70 years ago, united the post-war nations around a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and inspired us towards a fair, peaceful and just world.

The Centenary of the Armistice was recently celebrated in Europe. Let us all share in the hope that, in thirty years' time, the world can celebrate a true new international order, without a post-war period, where peace and human rights are a reality for generations to come!

Thank you very much.

27 November 2018,  
Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão