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“Timor-Leste’s Story: Securing its Sovereignty over Land and Sea”

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**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JOSÉ RAMOS-HORTA
[TRANSCRIPT]**

Thank you again Warren for welcoming us here in this office. You heard Prime Minister Rui Araújo's introduction speech. You will hear from a more authoritative person than me, Maun Boot, older brother Xanana Gusmão, who will better clarify to you our views on this issue.

I would like to just say that we as a government announced recently that we had an Indonesian delegation in Timor-Leste to begin preparation for maritime boundary negotiations with Timor-Leste. I was Foreign Minister when we began talks with Indonesia for land border demarcation. In a very short period of time, we reached agreement on about 98% and the actual physical work of border demarcation began. The two remaining per cent will probably be closed very soon. That's why both Indonesia and Timor-Leste are now ready to start negotiations on maritime boundaries. Of course the more complicated has been and will be with Australia.

We share the Timor Sea between Timor-Leste and Australia. We have 368miles, I think, which means there's overlap preventing each side claiming 200 miles. Being the case that it is established in international law, you draw a median line. It is as simple as that. Simple if there had been no oil and gas in the area that one side had already been exploiting years before Timor-Leste succeeded to independence. But what Timor-Leste claims is very, very simple, very basic and is nothing out of this world. We should agree on a maritime boundary by following the international practice of median line delimitation.

Australia as you know is a friend of Timor-Leste. Australia contributed enormously, particularly in 1999 to securing an international consensus, along with the United Nations, to address the conflict at the time in 1999. And Australia paid a heavy political price in its relationship with Indonesia for leading the UN mission at the time. And Australia has been very, very generous since then in assisting the government of Timor-Leste in development assistance. And we have a great ongoing relationship – people to people, government to government. There is a new Prime Minister in Australia. The one that we had dealt with in the past two years was ousted in a bloodless situation, unlike in some of our countries where coups are much more serious, with more serious implications; in Australia, they do it more peacefully. This has created a whole new political arrangement in Australia. Sometimes, when you are in a deadlock or a tense situation, a change of government can be for the better. There might be new thinking on the part of Australia that it would make absolute sense to really draw the median line and establish maritime boundaries and review existing arrangements that would really be more fair and just for the people of Timor-Leste.

In the current international situation, we deal with incredible tensions and violence in the world, and one thing that always comes to my mind is that if governments and leaders deal with the situations with a sense of sentiment, of compassion, of wisdom, many of these problems would not have occurred.



So, I would hope that Australia being the self-assured country that it is, that it would sit down with our side and amicably agree on what is fair and what will mutually advantage both Timor-Leste and Australia. In the long run, Australia as a developed country also depends on active international partnerships and active international trade in order to have a stable, prosperous Timor-Leste and a stable, prosperous region. I believe that in Australia common sense and wisdom will prevail and the maritime boundary talks will be expeditious. I am an eternal optimist, sometimes naive or too often naive, but I think we will be able to reach an agreement, because I know Australia well. I travelled all over Australia, crossed the desert by bus, hitch hiking way back in the early 70s trying to flee the conscript army in Timor-Leste. I was then sent back to Timor after three months. Well, I actually went back after three months because I didn't want to be arrested in Australia, so I went back. So I know the country well and the people, extraordinary people. That's why I am very optimistic that with the power of compassion on the part of the Australian public, and wisdom on our side as well, we will be able to reach an agreement. So those are my comments, not technical but influenced by my previous training for priesthood; that's why I talk this way. Thank you.