

**FORUM HOSTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE
AND THE MARITIME BOUNDARY OFFICE**

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

International Peace Institute, New York City, 1 October 2015

2

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, MINISTER FOR PLANNING AND
STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
OF TIMOR-LESTE, XANANA GUSMÃO
[TRANSCRIPT]**

Thank you everybody and good morning.

I hope that you can understand our problems. I feel very happy because it is the first time that I have come to the International Peace Institute.

Sometimes when we talk about peace, we look at Africa and war. We think that the time to talk about peace is when there is war in countries. But I believe peace is not only the absence of war, peace is also peace of mind.

We are going to talk about the mind and mindset. My colleague, Dr. José Ramos Horta, is very optimistic about Australia. I am not. This is democracy.

We have different opinions because, as a former prime minister of the United Kingdom said, there are no permanent allies, no permanent friends but only permanent interest.

This is the problem. This is the mindset. This is the mindset of powerful nations when they deal with small countries like ours.

Yes, we recognise and do not deny the participation of the Australian soldiers after the 1999 referendum. But it was not to save us, it was to help us to put an end to the violence committed by the pro-Indonesian militias. It was not to save us.

We saved Australia during the Second World War. We were a Portuguese colony and Portugal’s policy was neutrality to avoid the invasion of Japan.

Japan bombed Darwin before coming to Timor-Leste but there was a war in our country to save Australia.

Our people died and many of our people also helped the Australian guerrillas. That was why in 1999, we could say that Australia paid their debt.

I have to correct this perception, because in Australia, at the political level, the message is always that Australia helped Timor-Leste, Australia saved Timor-Leste.

We say no because without our fight, the activists, the good defenders of our rights like, Professor Noam Chomsky and others here today Australia never would have entered in 1999 with its troops.



Why? Because in 1989, the Foreign Minister of Australia and Foreign Minister of Indonesia signed an agreement to exploit our resources, drinking champagne and forgetting that we were fighting there. A small guerrilla army against Indonesian battalions.

That is why we cannot agree with the political statements of, "We saved you. We are helping you." No, sorry.

While we were dying and in the Second World War about 70,000 Timorese died to defend Australia.

During our 24 year occupation, about 200,000 people died. When we were suffering, Australia and Indonesia signed an agreement to share our resources - you take 50, I take 50. And I believe Gareth Evans said to Ali Alatas, expedite the war, kill them and we get the benefits.

In 1999 Ian Martin was leading the UN Mission to prepare our referendum, after that I have to say that we were fighting for our independence but we never, never, never prepared ourselves to be independent in terms of our human resources, in terms of capabilities, and Australia took advantage of our lack of knowledge.

Some say naivety; I don't say that. I would prefer ignorance than naivety.

They took advantage of our lack of knowledge, of our lack of preparation, and we inherited a treaty signed with Indonesia that could not be avoided.

Instead of coming every six months to the world begging for money to help us build our country, it was an opportunity to get money. And we agreed, we agreed to continue that agreement.

After that, I believe that many of you have heard about seized documents and spying.

Yes, sometimes we hear about economic intelligence, financial intelligence, but we do not accept that using military intelligence to take advantage of economic negotiations is acceptable. That was why we filed the case.

We are talking about maritime boundaries because we are talking about the resources in the Timor Sea. I don't use the word forced, but I would say that Timor was not inclined to sign an agreement whereby we could not talk about maritime boundaries for 50 years and beyond that if the exploration of resources was still ongoing.

So only after there is nothing left, then we have maritime boundaries.

I repeat the former Prime Minister of the UK, interests are permanent.

Allies and friends, we feel year by year, we try to build our capacity to understand, to understand things, to understand the process, to correct this. I would say this is our virtue.

After two or three years, we looked back and realised that we had made a mistake and that we need to correct it.

We started to understand that we were being used by a big neighbour. A neighbour that I would repeat was the only Western country to recognise the annexation de jure.

The annexation that was not a peaceful annexation; it was a bloody annexation just for the resources. It is immoral for us, we should say.

That is why we are not coming here to ask for your understanding. If there were only tuna, crabs or crocodiles in our sea - but taking into consideration that there is something (petroleum), then we will not allow a big, rich, developed country to take that from us.

We got independence with the help of many of you, but we have not yet achieved our full sovereignty.

The world can be very peaceful, can be very democratic, but without the economic progress, economic development, it is the same, it is only creating the risk of violence and conflict.

In a very diplomatic and positive way, we hope Australia is going to come to sit together with us, but I don't believe that will happen. I am sceptical of this because I was sceptical during 24 years.

And we said, if we need to die to get independence, we will die, and we did. Now, I don't say we need to die, but if we have to fight, we have to fight for our full sovereignty.

The only way is the delimitation of the maritime borders. I say that because, as the Prime Minister already mentioned, the border between us and Australia is only 5% of the border of Australia.

And Australia has already signed maritime borders with all its neighbours except for us. Two months before becoming independent, Australia withdrew only for maritime border settlement.

It means something, it means something. At least it means bad faith. At least it means not a sentiment of compassion. It means something very different than compassion.

We are here. We are talking about this. I remember I went to the Democratic Republic of Congo. They are richer than us. They have problems. Richer than us with problems.

I went to the Central African Republic - also richer than us. There are problems there. I talked to the belligerent factions and they said that the root cause is there diamonds, their resources.

I believe that all of you know more than me about the problems in the world. If there are some conflicts or difference, the cause is always something more than the simple delimitation of a line or a border.

That is why we are here. We are here, as the Prime Minister said in his speech, because we hope that you can offer us your ideas.

Sometimes maybe because it is emotional, we don't have a calm way of thinking, and we hope that your participation here, ladies and gentlemen, can help us to think together. For us, that is important.

Sometimes we talk about sustainabilities; sometimes we talk about the future.

We do not play a big role in the international community.

We are not ambitious to become a country to make major decisions.

But we are helping, we are helping another 19 countries: fragile, in conflict, or post-conflict.

And in many of these countries, there are resources.

And the resources are also the cause of internal conflicts or conflict with others.

We will not avoid these countries.

We are against war and against whoever commits war or promotes war.

But in this conflict of interest, we will fight for our rights.

Thank you very much.