



**MINISTER OF PLANNING AND STRATEGIC INVESTMENT AND CHIEF NEGOTIATOR
FOR THE COUNCIL FOR THE FINAL DELIMITATION OF MARITIME BOUNDARIES**

**Speech by His Excellency the Minister for Planning and Strategic Investment and Chief
Negotiator for the Council for the Council for the Final Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries
Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão at the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples'
Forum**

**Dili, Timor-Leste
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Ladies and gentlemen,
Brother and sisters,
Friends from across our region,

It is a great pleasure to speak to you today at this ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum.

We are very thankful that you have come from across our region to meet here in Dili. In Timor-Leste we recognise the critical role you play in building a better society. And we know, from our experience, the power that civil society has when it works in solidarity across our region.

During our time of need, when we were forsaken by the world, when we were a forgotten people suffering enormous hardship and oppression, we had international civil society fight for us. It was this solidarity that gave us hope, that told us that we were not alone and that people of good will would not give up fighting for the rights of the Timorese people.

I would like to pay tribute today to the solidarity networks in our region that fought with us, and fought for us.

I can see in this room today people, lifelong friends, who stood by us. Even though you were from another country, with your own battles to fight, you sacrificed for our cause. Your generosity of spirit, and your courage to fight for the rights of the Timorese, humbled us and gave us faith in the good of humanity. We will always be grateful and we will always remember. Thank you.

That is also why we are so honoured to host you in Timor-Leste for this important conference. This conference will strengthen your ability to continue fighting for the people of our region.

We know from our experience that without a healthy and independent civil society we cannot have a healthy nation. Civil society fights for the weak and the powerless and works for a better society. It keeps governments accountable and shines a light on bad governance and corruption.

Just as civil society shadows governments, the ASEAN Peoples' Forum shadows ASEAN. You join together as activists putting people at the centre of ASEAN. You bring together different networks of people – peace builders, solidarity and human rights activists, environmentalists, advocates for indigenous communities, LGBT activists and many other groups that are fighting to make Southeast Asia a better place.

Timor-Leste commends your passion and your commitment to improving the lives of people and improving our communities.

We see throughout our region, and across the world, the critical role that civil society plays. It is a strong advocate for tolerance, human dignity and peace.

Importantly, civil society also monitors and restrains the actions of the State. It keeps the State accountable for its actions and provides an alternative and progressive vision for the future.

Friends,

This conference has brought you here to discuss how you can work together to make Southeast Asia a better place. You have discussed the challenges that civil society faces, and that our region faces, and I hope that you will come away with a growing sense of solidarity and a plan of action for the future.

During your stay in Timor-Leste I am pleased that you have had the opportunity to deepen your links with Timorese civil society. I know that during your community visits, you have had the chance to witness some of the great work being undertaken by our civil society. I know that you will have inspired them.

In coming together here in Dili you have also been able to work on building an ASEAN Community Vision.

ASEAN is a great success story. Our region has suffered the ravages of war, and the worst that colonialism has had to offer. It was not long ago that our

region was beset by conflict and hopelessness. It was in our region that we witnessed some of the worst of humanity. And yet, ASEAN has brought our region together in solidarity and has built a region of peace, cooperation and development.

It has brought together countries with different cultures, histories and religions and forged a sense of common identity. It is this same common identity that we feel today, that brings us together in solidarity.

Southeast Asia is now a dynamic region and an economic powerhouse with a huge labour market. Peace has brought wealth and prosperity and has lifted many of our people out of poverty. Through ASEAN we have promoted mutual respect across our region and allowed open and honest dialogue between our countries.

The history of Southeast Asia can also give hope to many of the world's fragile and underdeveloped countries that are still walking their path towards development.

We must celebrate the success of ASEAN and the change it has brought to our region – but we must make sure that people are at the centre of this change.

Friends,

As ASEAN develops we must make sure the governments of our region put people first.

I am sure that you have been discussing at this conference many of the challenges civil society faces in Southeast Asia. Governments of our region, including our Government in Timor-Leste, are not perfect.

And in our region, and beyond, we are seeing worrying trends – we are seeing a breakdown of trust between political leadership and the people. We are seeing political environments that are making it harder for civil society organisations to do their good work.

While we celebrate growth, we are seeing entrenched privilege and wealth supporting political systems that fail to act in the peoples' interests.

We are witnessing a collapse in the social contract that should bring us all together. And out of the rubble, we are seeing politicians more concerned with the future of their own careers than the future of their countries.

The agendas that are being pushed by the powerful represent an attack on our ability to engage collectively. Instead of the powerful working to provide better health care, and better social welfare, and better education for people – all the things that bring us together and nurture the health of our societies – they instead preach individual responsibility. They are telling people that they need to look after themselves – that if they fail, or if they are weak, it is their own fault.

What they are really saying is that they abdicate their responsibility to the poor, to the vulnerable, to the oppressed and to those without a voice. This failure to take responsibility makes it harder for us to build our civil societies. It makes it harder for us to build a sense of community and it makes it harder for us to build solidarity. It is the opposite of putting people at the centre of society.

This is a political disease that provides us with a system that is not fair, that is not pro-people.

Instead, we have a morally bankrupt financial sector that serves the interests of the wealthy without regard to its impact on people. We have an international taxation system that allows multinational corporations to avoid paying their fair share while we all struggle. We have political systems that work in the interests of the rich and the powerful while seeking to divide people by promoting intolerance, racism and exclusion.

Friends,

While we face turmoil and challenges we have the opportunity to make Southeast Asia a better place. We have the opportunity to celebrate the positive change in our region by putting people at the centre.

We know that this can be done. Through the solidarity of people like you, the Timorese achieved independence. While the Timorese cause seemed hopeless, and the world told us we could never prevail, it was through people demanding change that we achieved our freedom.

We can celebrate many great changes throughout our region where we put people first. The Timorese story is just one of many, but it shows that great success we can have if we work together with courage and passion and solidarity.

Friends,

You have already helped us achieve our freedom, and we will never forget that - but I ask of you one last thing. The Timorese have a final struggle to achieve our sovereignty.

Timor-Leste does not have maritime borders with either of its maritime neighbours, Indonesia and Australia.

Determining our maritime boundaries is a matter of sovereignty for us – it is the final step in our struggle for independence. It will give us our sovereign rights over our seas, as well as our lands, and help secure the future of our people and our nation.

We fought for 24 years for sovereignty over our land. And we will continue to fight for sovereignty over our seas. Timor-Leste is committed to upholding international law. All States, however big or small, are equal under international law. Timor-Leste does not expect special treatment, only equal treatment, as we negotiate with our larger neighbours.

Our friend Indonesia has agreed to begin discussions to set our maritime boundaries with us. Australia, however, has refused to negotiate with us.

Just months before our independence, Australia withdrew from the compulsory dispute settlement procedures under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. And since then, Australia has refused our invitations to negotiate.

The Australian government has taken this course of action because it knows it is acting against international law. It knows the resource sharing arrangements in the Timor Sea deprive Timor-Leste of its sovereign rights.

We are a poor country, a Least Developed Country. And yet, Australia spied on our Cabinet room to achieve a commercial advantage in the negotiations over resources in the Timor Sea.

Australia took advantage of our vulnerability, of our inexperience, and secured access to resources that under international law belong to Timor-Leste.

All nations have the right to delimit their maritime boundaries. Australia has settled its maritime boundaries with each of its six other maritime neighbours. But it has refused to do so with us – even though we represent just 1.8% of Australia's huge maritime boundary.

Australia's behaviour is undermining the international system – a system that has been designed to protect nations like yours and mine.

So in April this year Timor-Leste initiated a compulsory conciliation process under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Under this process a panel of independent experts will seek to assist our two countries reach an amicable solution.

If an agreement cannot be reached, the Commission will provide a report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with recommendations to assist a resolution. While the outcome of the process is not binding, it obliges Australia to sit down and negotiate – in good faith – maritime boundaries with us.

We believe this process will also give hope to other countries that are poor and that are being exploited by rich and powerful nations.

Friends,

Like our struggle for independence, we cannot prevail alone. We need your help and courage to again shape the future of our country. We ask you to

support us in our struggle to complete our independence and achieve our sovereign rights under international law in the Timor Sea.

We ask you one last time for your solidarity to support us in securing a positive future for our people.

Thank you very much