



**Speech by  
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*The challenges of nation-building in a post-conflict society:  
the role of neighbouring countries*

Distinguished Friends of the UN and Timor-Leste,

Distinguished representatives of the Lowy Institute,

It is indeed a great honour to have the opportunity to address you today on the situation in Timor-Leste, with a particular emphasis on the challenges of nation building in a post-conflict society and the critical role of neighbouring countries. Let me begin by recording my deepest appreciation for the long-standing and significant support by the Australia, and its people, to Timor-Leste, even before the restoration of the independence of Timor-Leste a little over six years ago, on 20 May 2002.

Timor-Leste is a small country with a population of about 1 million occupying the eastern portion of the island of Timor. It has, nevertheless, a proud history and a rich culture built up over centuries of diverse ethnic and colonial influences. However, in the recent past, the society has seen considerable fragmentation resulting from different world outlooks of those who were members of the Timorese diaspora between 1975 and 1999; those who stayed behind and struggled for independence and finally those who remained in Timor-Leste but either cooperated with the Indonesian rule or at least acquiesced in it. The large number of those who reached adulthood during this period, the oldest of whom are now in their mid-forties and the youngest in early twenties, add to the complex social mix. Furthermore, earlier unresolved ethnic and linguistic tensions, superimposed on political differences of the immediate past, create a confusing blend of emotions and actions, leading to a volatile and inherently unstable political and security environment.

After a period of transition, following the Popular Consultations, the independence of Timor-Leste was restored on 20 May 2002, and the U.N. transitional administration turned over responsibility for governance to Timorese authorities.

Considering that the new government faced enormous challenges in the security and governance of the country, the Security Council created the United Nations Mission of Support in Timor-Leste (UNMISSET) in May 2002. The Mission was established with the mandate: to provide assistance to core administrative structures critical to the viability and political stability of the country; to provide interim law enforcement and public security and to assist in developing the Timor-Leste Police Service; and to contribute to the maintenance of the new country's external and internal security. When the mandate of UNMISSET was completed in May 2005, Timor-Leste was considered to be on the right path and the Security Council established a successor political mission, the United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL) to support the development of critical State institutions. UNOTIL was scheduled to end its mandate in May 2006, and the Security Council had already received the Secretary-General's recommendations for the post-UNOTIL period when the crisis of two years ago, 2006, intervened.

A lot has been written by researchers, experts and journalists about why it all suddenly appeared to go wrong, just as we, in the international community, were starting to celebrate a major success in building peace and democracy in Timor-Leste. I believe that insufficient attention had been paid by both, the Timorese authorities and the international community, to the underlying social rifts that defined the Timorese society. I also believe that we were all, both Timorese and non-Timorese alike, confident too soon, and relying largely upon superficial indicators, that sufficient capacities had been created in the Timorese security agencies to meet future crises on their own. Obviously, this faith was misplaced. If I may digress a bit, it is clear to me that training of a police service that is impeccably turned out for a parade takes a few months, provision of necessary professional skills, such as firearms training, might take another year, but the development of internal controls and an institutional culture that is consistent with the principles of a democracy, such as neutrality, transparency, adherence to the rule of law and self-restraint, requires a societal change that takes a generation or more. Training how to shoot straight is the easy part, training when not to shoot, particularly when an illegal order might have been received from a superior, is the more difficult, time consuming, and if I may say, a less glamorous task

that is sadly, therefore, often neglected, particularly because the successes do not readily lend themselves to nice figures and statistics. I am not even sure that we have adequate precedents or best practices for how to effectively support such cultural change. What is clear is that it takes time. The ultimate success of Timor-Leste depends upon it.

Also, the judicial sector was still too weak to provide recourse for the aggrieved. Additionally, the population, especially the youth who constitute more than 50% of the population, had not seen the promises of independence reflected in their welfare through employment and other opportunities.

It is in this context that when I examine the events following the deplorable attacks on President Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Gusmão on 11 February this year, I find some cause for a renewed faith in the growing resilience of the Timorese institutions and capacities. The leadership and restraint shown by the Government in the face of the 11 February attacks indicated a positive development in overcoming the earlier limitations. The incidents did not plunge the country in a spiral of violence and unrest, as many had feared. The political leaders and the population united to face the threat to the State.

Yet, much still needs to be done. The current stability in Timor-Leste is only precariously balanced. Its fragile institutional structure is the major challenge facing Timor-Leste. This, coupled with limited capacity and lack of skills and training, undermines the building of a culture of peaceful settlement of conflicts.

### ***Role of Neighbouring Countries***

I recognise that the UN is a unique institution representing in some sense the collective will of the community of nations. However, I and the leaders of Timor-Leste also recognise that solid partnerships with all neighbouring and other interested countries are vital for the long-term statebuilding process. I categorically reject any characterisation of Timor-Leste as a failed or failing state; it is too young, nascent, to be a failure. It is a country where outside investment can have a real return – which can succeed if necessary support is provided.

Peacekeeping missions are timebound and must be complemented by the long-term commitment of neighbouring and other interested countries.

Efforts should be made to ensure that international efforts are framed within a coherent and holistic approach, each partner offering support where it enjoys a comparative advantage.

One advantage for Timor-Leste is its geographical context. It is fortunate in the neighbours that it has. Indonesia is itself undergoing a reform process and cooperates with Timor-Leste in a spirit of mutual respect.

Australia has also shown itself to be a solid partner, particularly through the sustained commitment of the ISF.

Reconstruction of the PNTL is a good example of the partnership between the UN, Australia, and Timor-Leste. The function of the UNMIT Police has a unique and ambitious mandate; not only implementing a comprehensive RRR programme, but also maintaining public law and order; and conducting PNTL vetting.

I would like to commend the good work being carried out by the Australian Timor-Leste Police Development Programme (TLPDP), whose contribution is greatly appreciated by the Timorese Government. TLPDP plays a valuable role in the area of PNTL Reform, Restructuring and Rebuilding (RRR).

However, police development is a long-term process that extends far beyond UN mission mandates. Over time, the RRR work currently carried out by UNMIT will be taken over by other bilateral actors. Thus, it is important for current and future police reform efforts that there is excellent coordination between UNMIT and Australia.

I previously mentioned the importance of the rule of law in the statebuilding process. As a major contributor to the UNDP Justice Support Programme, Australia is well aware of the importance of strengthening the legal system at all stages, including increasing efficiency and coordination between the police and the prosecution office. This is particularly important in handling cases of domestic violence and sexual assault, for which specialised assistance is required.

These are just a few examples of Australia's commitment to the statebuilding process in Timor-Leste, and cooperation between the UN, Australia and Timor-Leste.

The goal of the international community in partnership with the people of Timor-Leste should be to meet the challenges to the statebuilding process. We must ensure that the country rests upon the solid foundations of a shared culture of democratic governance, sustained socio-economic development and properly functioning judicial and security sectors based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. In this way, we can prevent a repetition of the events of 2006, and ensure a better future for the people of Timor-Leste. I strongly believe that these challenges can be met.

Also, in my opinion, if capacity constraints are not redressed in the short-term, the danger of constraints of will arising in the long-term is ever present. If a people become convinced, due to lack of capacity in solving their challenges through democratic means and the rule of law, while promoting and protecting all human rights, that it is better to seek other avenues that are more efficient than democracy, it would be a sad and unfortunate day.

We should therefore assist Timor-Leste, because developments in Timor-Leste affect us all, on account of our shared values and aspirations. With the gains of the past year, and the vibrant new political environment, we now have a new and critical opportunity to help Timor-Leste get things right.

I would like to highlight four other broad areas that must be constantly kept in mind while providing international assistance to Timor-Leste. I am convinced that Timor-Leste like any other country will face many crises in the future. A country and society is defined not by the absence of crisis but rather by the manner in which they are faced and resolved. In order to avoid the implosion suffered in 2006, and averted in 2008, the National Parliament, -- the real repository of the will of the people --, must be assisted to ensure that reasoned logical debates, followed by development of consensus or at least compromise solutions, define the responses to future crises.

Second, the culture and practice of democratic governance requires decades of patient nurturing to take hold. Elections are the beginning rather

than the end goal of a democratic process. Strengthening the mechanisms to ensure inclusiveness and participation in decision-making, transparency and accountability of administration, decentralization and responsiveness to the needs of the people, ability to forge a consensus on critical issues or in its absence to develop a compromise, are crucial if democracy is to succeed.

Third, I strongly believe that islands of excellence in the midst of a sea of underperformance are both, rare and unstable. A society has to develop as a whole and unfortunately, too little direct attention has been devoted to the development of societal capacities, as opposed to individual and institutional capacities that are both easier to transfer and to measure. I believe that greater attention to the development of civic education programmes and the strengthening of the capacities of an independent, objective media to inform the citizens, would yield rich dividends. It is only an empowered people that can ensure that their representatives work for their best interests. And, this is where the neighbouring countries and their nationals have a major role to play – simply by providing a window to the Timorese society in their interaction with the wider world.

Finally, Timor-Leste is neither too big nor too small. Thus, it possesses the ability to improve rapidly, as we have seen between April/May 2006 and now, but it is also in the danger of rapid deterioration as it lacks the required mass that enables larger countries to bear the storms that occasionally buffet them.

I apologize for speaking for too long but this is a subject close to my heart. I do believe that your efforts in Timor-Leste are beneficial not only to Timorese people and you, but indeed, to the creation of a world where democracy, respect for the rule of law and promotion and protection of all human rights are the norm. Timor-Leste today is an example of what a committed people can achieve if supported by their international brethren, but, I hope, that decades from now, it would be a beacon for those who share our values.

Thank you.