



**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY FRANCISCO GUTERRES LÚ OLO
PRESIDENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE
AT THE 72ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**TO BE DELIVERED
BY
H.E. MS. MARIA HELENA PIRES
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF TIMOR-LESTE TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

New York, 20 September 2017

Check against delivery

Excellencies, Mister President of the UN General Assembly
Mister Secretary General of the United Nations

I extend my congratulations to Mr President Miroslav Lajčák on his election by the General Assembly as well as my best wishes of success, and I salute the outgoing president Peter Thomson for his leadership in conducting the work of the 71st session.

We, the United Nations

It is a happy coincidence that I was given the opportunity to address this General Assembly today - on this very same day, 18 years ago, the first Australian and New Zealand personnel of the INTERFET, the International Force in East Timor, arrived in my country, occupied at the time. The arrival of that UN-mandated force on 20 September 1999 put an end to the bloodshed and paved the way for us to attain national independence voted for the majority of the Timorese people at the referendum for self-determination held under the supervision of the United Nations, pursuant to international law.

On behalf of the Timorese people, I reiterate my heartfelt gratitude to the United Nations and to all civilians and servicemen who, under the flag of the United Nations, protect innocents and, ultimately, save lives.

Another happy coincidence - though rare - is that among us here today is another key player in the process that led the international community and the UN to shoulder their long deferred responsibilities for the self-determination of the Timorese people. The key player I'm talking about is Secretary General António Guterres. As Prime Minister of Portugal, the action of António Guterres, guided by values and ethical imperatives, was decisive for Timor-Leste to be considered today a success story - a joint success of the Timorese and the United Nations - as others have pointed out several times in recent years.

Values of the international community

I warmly welcome the theme of the General Assembly, '*Focusing on People: Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet*'. These are, without a doubt, tasks for our generation. Allow me to assure you that Secretary General António Guterres is the right man to promote and inspire the beginning of this common path whose success depends on the intense commitment of us all.

The recent history of Timor-Leste vividly reminds us that when civil values, on which the very existence of the United Nations is built, take the lead - and inspire decisions - in the international scene, the UN and international law become powerful and decisive forces to settle conflicts and restore peace. Portugal's action in the 1990s, combined in 1998 and 1999 with the action of the governments of Indonesia, Australia, and the United States, and the

support of the European Union and other world powers, were living proof of the United Nations' ability to save lives and help make the world a safe place. The stability of the international scene is a function of the respect for International Law.

The UN and Timor-Leste have benefited from extraordinary individuals. I recall and salute Ian Martin; and I evoke the memory of the Special Representative of the Secretary General in Dili between 1999 and 2002, our dearly departed friend and brother Sérgio Vieira de Mello. The sensibility and competence, the capacity for dialogue and political achievement of these and of a few other leaders made it possible for us to achieve together better results despite the trail of unprecedented devastation found in the country when it became ours. The nature of leadership is important for the unfolding of the political and social processes - and can be decisive for success. The professional and human qualities of our dearly departed Sérgio Vieira de Mello - diplomat and leader - must continue to inspire us on a daily basis so that the UN does not fail to meet the heartfelt yearnings for stability and development opportunities of many peoples around the world.

The first 15 years

Timor-Leste celebrates this year the 15th anniversary of the Restoration of Independence which took place on 20 May 2002. Over these last fifteen years, the partnerships we have established with the UN, their specialised agencies and development partners have led to important and inspiring results. I'm afraid I do not have the time to expand further on this topic. I will only say that over these last years we have achieved what few thought possible:

The mortality rates of infants and children under the age of five have dropped by half. According to the World Health Organization, Timor-Leste managed to reduce malaria incidence from 220 in 1,000 cases (2006) to 1 in 1,000 - including cases registered in remote areas. In 2002 there were 19 doctors in Timor-Leste. Today we have nearly 1,000 trained by the solidarity-based cooperation of the people and the government of Cuba. There are doctors in every village of Timor-Leste and several new hospitals. My country was declared leprosy-free by the WHO for the first time in centuries.

And last, in 2002 life expectancy at birth was 60 years. Today it is 68 and a half. The progress made in several areas was acknowledged by the distinguished medical journal *The Lancet* which ranked Timor-Leste as the country that has made the most progress since 2000 when it comes to the Sustainable Development Goals.

We consider Education, as is the case with Healthcare, a key priority. The enrolment rates in primary education stands at nearly 100% of school-age children and youths. We have recently introduced a new curriculum at primary education level and have given priority to the construction of new schools and the improvement of school equipment, in particular in recent years. The guiding thread of these and many other measures is the improvement of the quality of public schools.

The progress we made has translated into the human development index reported by the UNDP, the United Nations Development Programme: over the past 6 years, this index reached on average 0.610. In 2002 it was 0.375.

International Integration

The most important achievement of the Timorese people over the course of these 15 years – the foundation of other achievements – was peacebuilding and reconciliation at both national and international levels. Peace and reconciliation were made possible by the vision of the national leaders, by the courage to reject vengeance and by the genuine adherence of Timorese society as a whole to this vision.

We have established solid relations of friendship and intense cooperation with Indonesia and Australia; we are working towards further strengthening our relations with neighbouring ASEAN countries, the association to which we have submitted our application for membership. The strengthening of Timor-Leste's regional integration is a key priority of our foreign policy. I rejoice at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of ASEAN and salute this association for its decisive contribution towards transforming Southeast Asia into a safer, stable, more democratic and prosperous region, ranking amongst the highest growth rates in the world and offering increased well-being to the peoples in the region.

Sustainable development

In Timor-Leste, now that peace and stability have been achieved, we are putting our efforts into creating better conditions for economic and social development. This includes, namely, improving the development conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises and the private sector in general, and promoting the diversification of the non-oil economy.

The goal that we have set for ourselves in our Strategic Development Plan, approved in 2011, is that by 2030 'Timor-Leste will have joined the ranks of upper middle income countries, eradicated extreme poverty and established a sustainable and diversified non-oil economy'. This is the plan that we are putting into action.

In fact, our goals converge with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015, to whose definition we actively contributed as well.

g7+ and the priority of strong institutions

We believe that a key condition for the development of the country is the existence of stability and solid institutions, providing quality public services. This is why my country proposed the inclusion of 'quality institutions' among the Sustainable Development Goals. Timor-Leste's proposal was accepted and it became the 16th SDG – "*Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*".

The relationship between quality institutions and development is, for us, an old priority, which

translated into Timor-Leste's commitment to the creation of the 'g7 plus' group since 2009. The 'g7 plus' brings together twenty fragile states and the group's action has had tangible and positive results in the relationships with development partners and in the functioning of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The mutual advantages of its functioning have been recognised by the parties, including by the development partners.

Our democracy has been strengthened, election after election, with high turnout figures. That happened again this year, with presidential and parliamentary elections. The *Democracy Index* from The Economist¹ considers Timor-Leste the most democratic country in Southeast Asia. This independent assessment strengthens our conviction that the sacrifices and the efforts made by our people have been worth it. It was the restoration of independence, in 2002, that brought to Timor-Leste the Rule of Law and the respect for Human Rights for the first time in centuries of history! This humanist heritage is precious to us.

The Global Agenda; Multilateralism

Excellencies, distinguished delegates.

If for no other reason, our national experience taught us to value multilateralism as a privileged instrument to respond to challenges within the international system. But there are other reasons. One of those reasons is the Global Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Agenda embodies the potential of multilateralism to improve the planet and the well-being of the people. Benefiting from the global experience of the Millennium Development Goals process – with the introduction of the appropriate corrections – the success of the new Agenda can in fact and for the first time in the history of the world, eradicate extreme poverty and create a new paradigm of equal development opportunities within the international system. The success of the Agenda will benefit many millions of people whom poverty deprives of Basic Human rights. Only dialogue, negotiation, multilateral cooperation and democratic respect can meet the ambitious goals we established until 2030.

International society faces other unprecedented challenges, which also require multilateral cooperation and global responses:

The Paris Agreement

We believe that climate change will have growing impact on the development conditions of human societies and on the future of the planet. The impact on food security, among others, is at the core of our concerns and has been the target of several government measures, including

¹ The *Democracy Index* compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit and published last January takes into consideration social and political circumstances, namely the electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, political participation, political culture and functioning of the institutions..

within the scope of multilateral cooperation in the CPLP, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, which we recently had the honour to preside.

I want to tell you, unambiguously, that the implementation of the Paris Agreement, which my country already ratified, is an inalienable responsibility of all states, big and small, to protect the planet from risks, where possible, and coordinate responses to vulnerabilities, where necessary.

Terrorism and other transnational crimes

Timor-Leste gives top priority to international cooperation in the fight against transnational criminality at all levels. We, the international community, have the inalienable duty to work to realize the civilization values enshrined in the Charter and the conventions of the United Nations. Experiencing these values requires the strengthening of cooperation against international criminality, namely in the suppression and elimination of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of adults and children and in the fight against international financial criminality, terrorism and other crimes. My country attaches great importance to international cooperation to fight against extremism, radicalism, terrorism, and piracy.

Multilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism and transnational criminality, without exception, must be strengthened without hesitation and similarly without compromising the respect for human rights and other applicable international law. To compromise the values of our civilization in this fight would be, in itself, a victory for terrorism and criminality. Timor-Leste participates in important multilateral processes for regional and international stability and security. We will continue to expand and deepen our participation in those processes.

Women and Citizenship

The state of Timor-Leste, with the support of the civil society and the development partners, has been implementing initiatives to promote the participation and the contribution of women in the process of social and economic development, including legal provisions against discrimination. There are many Timorese women in positions of high responsibility within the government, the Justice system, and other public or civil society institutions. One third of the members of the Timor-Leste National Parliament are women. Nevertheless, the protection of women against exploitation and the advancement of their role in society still require the development of policies that promote equality. Timor-Leste believes that, at the United Nations level, specific and decisive actions in favour of equality continue to be necessary – because women are often still the primary target of social discrimination and criminal exploitation.

Negotiation and nuclear non-proliferation

At this time, the world is facing two large threats to international peace: the hotbeds of war in the Middle East and the nuclearisation and escalation of tensions in the Korean Peninsula. My country calls on all parties involved, in both regions, to show utmost restraint, as to avoid measures and initiatives that would aggravate the situation. Timor-Leste calls on all parties to fully respect international conventions and the applicable resolutions of the Security Council. I specifically call for dialogue and negotiation to help dissipate tensions and promote the peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Korean Peninsula.

I welcome the International Atomic Energy Agency's recent findings about the absence of signs of non-compliance with the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed by the Permanent Five Plus One² and Iran. This negotiation and the compliance with this plan demonstrate the importance of dialogue for stability and the de-escalation of tensions.

Timor-Leste is in favour of non-proliferation and of negotiated nuclear disarmament. I call on the signatory countries of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to continue their joint efforts towards disarmament and non-proliferation, in preparation for the review of the treaty scheduled for 2020, to strengthen the non-proliferation regime.

Migrations and illegal immigrants

Our times bear witness to migratory movements of enormous size. Millions upon millions of people seek protection or basic economic means of survival, as a result of regional development asymmetries that are often shocking. My country welcomes the prospect of an intergovernmental conference on migration to be held next year, and considers it urgent to improve the coordination of the international community and the quality of the reception of these massive floods of migrants and refugees. It is also necessary to tackle the root of the problem, increasing development opportunities in depressed regions and reducing the motivation for migration flows.

Incomplete decolonisation

The UN was created in 1945, with the admission of 51 countries. Today, we are 193 member states. It is inspiring to reflect on the reasons for this exponential increase – the result of the greatest victory in the history of international society to date: the establishment of the principle and effective exercise of the right of all peoples to self-determination.

That victory of the peoples – the decolonisation – is also a victory of the United Nations. Nevertheless, the exercise of the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination continues to be postponed. The Sahrawi are peacefully waiting for the parties to comply with the relevant UN resolutions.

² The Joint Comprehensive Action Plan (Joint Comprehensive Action Plan) was negotiated and signed by the five permanent members of the Security Council plus the European Union and Iran (often referred to as the *P5+1 and Iran*).

They have been waiting for 26 years.

Dialogue and good neighbourliness

I call for dialogue between the Kingdom of Morocco and the legitimate representatives of the Sahrawi people and call on the United Nations to seek an urgent solution to hold a referendum on the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

I also call for the lifting of the embargo against the Republic of Cuba, an anachronistic situation that is massively rejected by the international community.

I am very pleased to inform this General Assembly that Timor-Leste and Australia have made significant progress – decisive, even – in the talks about the demarcation of our shared maritime border.

INSERIR PARÁGRAFO.

I am pleased about the establishment of dialogue between the Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China on matters regarding the South China Sea, and also about the signs of progress arising from the ASEAN ministers meeting on the development of a Code of Conduct for the settlement of disputes in that area.

Timor-Leste supports the decision made by the ASEAN ministers, highlighting the need for measures to strengthen mutual trust between the states in the region and the exercise of the utmost restraint to avoid escalation and find peaceful solutions for current disputes, within the constraints of international law – including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

I also wish to convey, on this occasion, to the people and to the President of the Philippines, the solidarity of the people and of the state of Timor-Leste with the firm response of the Philippine government to the attempts to destabilise the country by international extremist groups.

Timor-Leste: the next few years

Earlier I told you about the fruits we reaped from the Restoration of Independence of Timor-Leste 15 years ago. However, I am aware, as well as our people, of the great challenges to be overcome over the next few years. Despite the remarkable progress made with regard to some social and human indicators, the truth is that we must do better to achieve the goals set for 2030. Timor-Leste's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals is a structuring element of our inclusive, sustainable and productive vision for the Timorese economy over the next 10 years. I spoke to you about our vibrant democracy and our State apparatus: but we are quite aware of the need to qualify even more people - more well-prepared – to ensure better services. We need improved public services to achieve the Global Agenda goals. The Timorese State and public opinion are aware of this need. We are also aware of the need to improve the

mechanisms for transparency and accountability so as to eradicate waste, poor management practices and corruption.

These are our current goals. I am certain that we will achieve them. The Timorese citizens have also shown great commitment to these goals.

Achieving them will be our new battle, but this time a battle in times of peace.

I conclude by acknowledging the support of our development partners and the international community as a whole. We could not have come so far if it had not been for these partnerships. And today the support of our partners is equally precious for us to speed up our efforts to diversify the economy, develop our national productive sector and substantially improve the quality of our public services, as well as to improve our people's social and economic indicators and deliver higher levels of welfare over the next fifteen years.

From our side, we see development as a product of stability and confidence of the social and economic stakeholders. This holds true not only at national level but also internationally. Timor-Leste will continue to closely cooperate at all levels towards regional and international security and stability. The support of the international community is highly valued by our people.

Thank you all.