



**P R I M E
M I N I S T E R**

**INTERVENTION BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
AT THE HIGH-LEVEL PANEL: 9TH OUR OCEAN CONFERENCE: AN
OCEAN OF POTENTIAL**

[3 minutes]

Athens, Greece

16 April 2024



Palácio do Governo
Avenida Marginal
Dili, Timor-Leste

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to speak at the Ninth Our Ocean Conference and I would like to thank His Excellency Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Prime Minister of Greece, for his invitation and for hosting this event.

When I was a secondary school student, I had learned of Greece as the cradle of philosophy, art and democracy. It is therefore a great honour to be here in Athens at this important international conference – and as a Small Island Developing State I was also compelled to attend this conference to discuss ocean-related issues.

And I can say that even though this is my first visit to Greece, when I first glimpsed the country – while still in the air - I was amazed by the beauty of its sea, and of its lakes, all one colour, the same blue as the sky!

The perfect union between sea and land, so clear and sacred. This perfect union dazzled me, of an ocean so serene and without ripples, in contrast to my Timor Sea. That is why, when I landed in Athens and saw the coastline outlined in blue, I reflected on the purpose of this conference and how it is being held in a perfect and inspiring location for us Timorese who are taking the first steps towards developing our Blue Economy.

As such it is a privilege to be here with the ocean's most passionate advocates to discuss our common interest - the health of our ocean and the potential it holds.

Timor-Leste was fortunate to be able to participate in the Our Ocean Conference in Bali, Indonesia, in 2018.

In 2022, Timor-Leste also attended the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon. Timor-Leste is fully behind the international efforts to protect our ocean.

The ocean serves as a unifying force, connecting nations and communities across the globe. Our lives, identities and cultures are all linked to the vastness of the sea.

And, this panel – from Seychelles to São Tomé e Príncipe, ending with Timor-Leste – is the real evidence of this reality!

For Timor-Leste, our relationship with the ocean runs deep. Timor-Leste enjoys unparalleled marine biodiversity, with over 75% of the world's coral reef species calling our waters home.

Timor's seas are a sanctuary for marine life. Every year we welcome the migration of majestic creatures, like pygmy blue whales, along our north coast.

As a Small Island Developing State, we are looking to build a Blue Economy so that we can conserve our environment and provide opportunities for our people.

Timor-Leste's commitment

To achieve this, my government is making every effort to develop a Blue Economy Policy and Action Plan - an initiative I personally oversee. This Plan will set out concrete actions to protect our ocean, including efforts to:

- expanding our Marine Protected Areas to conserve our biodiversity and tropical reefs;
- establishing Ataúro Island as a national marine park to sustainably manage and protect its marine life;
- developing a Marine Education Centre to improve marine literacy for our people, including our young people;
- taking action to combat illegal fishing;
- stopping plastic pollution of our seas.

However, none of this will be possible without global cooperation and meaningful partnerships driven by concrete actions and urgent actions, as previous panelists, during all day have called for.

In 2014, Timor-Leste took part in the Small Island Developing States Conference (SIDS) in Samoa. In October last year, Timor-Leste went to Bali to participate in the Archipelagic and Island States Forum. Next month, Timor-Leste will participate in the 4th International Conference on SIDS in Antigua and Barbuda.

We now have a better understanding of the need for these small pieces of land, anchored in the sea - our island-States united in our shared connection to the ocean – to work together to achieve sustainable development and marine conservation.

That is why we say: we depend on the ocean, and the ocean depends on us!

As a Small Island Developing State, Timor-Leste is also here to learn from the experiences of other countries, and to forge partnerships to protect and sustain our ocean. We look forward to working together to protect our ocean.

Thank you.