

KEYNOTE SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER DR RUI MARIA DE ARAÚJO AT THE 2015 TIMOR-LESTE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS' MEETING

Dili

6 June 2015

Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of the Central African Republic
Distinguished members of Parliament
Minister of Planning and Strategic Investment
Members of the Government
Representatives from the Diplomatic Corps
Ambassadors of Timor-Leste
g7+ Delegates
Representatives from Civil Society
Directors and Public Servants
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to speak for the first time to the Development Partners' Meeting as the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste.

This meeting has a proud tradition of bringing us together with our international friends to chart our national development.

It is also an opportunity for us to say thank you to the international community for supporting us and to share our priorities and vision for our future.

Sadly, we meet at this Development Partners' Meeting in the shadow of the passing of a national hero, the Minister of State, Coordinator of Social Affairs and Minister of Education, Fernando La Sama de Araújo.

La Sama fought bravely for the liberation of our people and led the youth and students in our resistance struggle. Following his arrest during the occupation he spent years in prison where he continued the fight for our cause. After independence, La Sama led the Democratic Party and served our nation as a President of the Parliament, as Deputy Prime Minister and, in this government, as a Coordinating Minister.

Despite his great contribution to our country, he remained both a humble and a kind man. He was widely respected and loved. Timor-Leste will be poorer for his passing and we will miss him.

While our nation mourns the passing of a great man, I would like to give thanks to the international community and our development partners for both mourning with us and for showing such deep respect for our national hero.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These meetings are important to our country and often mark milestones in our development.

Our first Development Partners' Meeting was held in Tokyo in 1999 shortly after our historic vote for independence. This meeting set the framework for our relationship with our development partners. It also signified the important role to be played by Japan in building our country.

After the crisis of 2006, we did not hold a Development Partners' Meeting until 2008, when at that year's meeting we came together as a nation to reject conflict and to embrace development.

At the 2011 Development Partners' Meeting we released our Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030 which sets the long term framework to achieve the dreams of our nation.

And last year we held our Development Partners' Meeting to coincide with the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries Summit and we were joined by our brothers and sisters from the CPLP. It was the first time that the CPLP Summit was held in the Asia Pacific and it also saw Timor-Leste assume the Presidency for the first time.

We consider it a mark of respect to the international community that our Development Partners' Meetings have signified important steps in the development of our country.

And today, we open the 2015 Development Partners' Meeting during a historic transition in our country.

After many years of preparing and planning for a transition to a younger generation, Timor-Leste has a government which has embraced new talent while retaining our most experienced Ministers.

We are all pleased that this transition has been so smooth. It has been a tribute to the political maturity of the Timorese people and our recognition that hyper-partisanship was not in the best interests of our nation.

National unity was the key to the achievement of our independence, and national unity is the key to our development. What this means is that our people must put the interests of the nation ahead of their own personal or political interests.

And so, the new Government has brought together people from all four of the political parties represented in our National Parliament. It includes a younger generation of leaders who we all look toward to take us into the future.

While the transition has brought change, we also recognise the need for continuity and certainty and we know we must build on the achievements of previous governments. We

continue to progress our country under the framework of the Strategic Development Plan. That is why our Government Program, which was endorsed by the National Parliament, continues to pursue progress and drive reform in the areas of social, economic and infrastructure development as well as in institutional governance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since independence, Timor-Leste has come a long way. We have moved from a fragile country overcoming the ghosts of our traumatic past, to a nation that is consolidating the foundations of our State. We have built a democratic society with a free media and a universal commitment to human dignity.

In recognition that we must all move beyond conflict and grievance to progress as a society, and in a spirit of peace and reconciliation, we have secured stability and given ourselves new possibilities for the future.

With a foundation of security and peace, we have been able to grow our economy to provide more jobs for our people. And we have been able to set a long term plan to build our infrastructure and improve our social services.

All of us here know, however, that despite our progress we still face many challenges. Too many of our people are living in poor conditions with inadequate access to health care, education, clean water, basic infrastructure and government services.

Our development and our economic growth has not been balanced. We can see rising inequality and a disparity between the living conditions of those in Dili and the municipalities.

There is also a need to improve government service delivery and the quality of government public works. Regrettably, parts of our civil service have become unresponsive to the needs of our people and have lost sight of the common good.

We are reforming our civil service so it will be accountable for delivering results and services for all our people.

Last week, Tuesday 26 May, marked our 100th day in office. In this short period, the Government was characterised by action and a focus on results.

In this short time the government has already taken important steps to improve health care with the launch of Primary Health Care Guidelines which provide a complete package of essential services for community health including house visits and clinical care focusing on the family.

We have trained over 8,000 teachers on our new curriculum for Pre-School Education and for the 1st and 2nd Years of Basic Education which will improve the quality of education and lead to higher rates of literacy and numeracy.

We have launched important community infrastructure projects across the country such as the irrigation project in Bulutu, Manatuto, which will benefit around 600 households and supply water to 780 hectares of rice fields.

The Government has also established the National Logistics Centre as a public enterprise and it has already supplied over 2,000 tons of rice to communities across Timor-Leste.

We have stressed the need to diversify our economy to secure a sustainable future and create jobs and we have committed to focusing on our tourism and agricultural industries as well as building an on-shore petroleum sector. As part of this, we hosted our first International Building and Construction Expo which attracted over 80 companies that will be critical to our nation building efforts.

We have also made it a national priority to finalise our maritime boundaries so that we can enjoy full sovereignty over our land and our seas. To achieve this, the new Government has established a Council for the Final Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries to coordinate and manage Timor-Leste's efforts to achieve permanent maritime boundaries.

The Government has also reinforced our commitment to the combatants for our national liberation. We have designated 3 March every year as a national day dedicated to honouring the contribution of our veterans and commemorating our resistance struggle. We have also been assisting our veterans establish a national veterans' organisation and we thank Australia and the Australian Returned and Services League for supporting us in this regard.

The government has also forged a new partnership with Civil Society to ensure we deliver quality services to our people. We are introducing 'social audits' that will allow the beneficiaries of public money to evaluate policy and project development, as well as government implementation, against stated objectives using proper evidence. We are now working with Civil Society to develop the process for undertaking social audits in the key areas of agriculture, education, health and basic infrastructure.

Perhaps most importantly, in our first 100 days the government set a tone and a benchmark for good governance. This includes the need for transparency, ethical leadership, accountability for performance, employment on merit and evidence based policy making.

Ladies and gentlemen

I would also like to briefly mention three key policy reform areas which will be a priority for the Government. These are reforms of public administration, the harmonisation and standardisation of laws, and fiscal and tax reform.

As we all know, Timor-Leste is heavily dependent on petroleum revenue which is subject to volatile returns. The recent dramatic fall in the oil price has challenged our fiscal

sustainability. To address this challenge, we are beginning a comprehensive fiscal reform to achieve a balance between State expenditures and revenues. This reform will involve the three interrelated areas of tax reform, public expenditure reform and economic diversification.

We will seek to establish a modern, fair and simple tax system to broaden our tax base and provide the necessary revenue to provide social services and support a diversified economy.

With public expenditure reform we will ensure that public resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible towards national needs and priorities. The objective of this reform is to increase the quality of public services and improve productivity. To do this we will be adopting measures that increase financial controls on public expenditure, eliminate waste and unnecessary spending and improve the link between planning and budgeting to better direct public expenditure towards development priorities.

We will also be supporting the diversification of our economy to create jobs and expand the tax base. To do this, we are examining measures to support private sector enterprises operating in key economic development areas, such as tourism and agriculture, and attract and retain domestic and foreign direct investment.

Taken together, these three reform areas will assist the attainment of fiscal sustainability and we will be looking to work with our development partners to help us with this reform process.

The Government will also be enacting reforms to strengthen the justice sector to consolidate stability, peace and the rule of law. There has been significant progress establishing the justice system in Timor-Leste, however, substantial challenges remain. We are committed to a productive and effective system that is able to provide procedural fairness and compliance with basic rights and freedoms.

To achieve this we will be working together with the justice sector to consolidate the legal framework and harmonise the legal order, taking into account the Timorese context. To progress reform we will be reviewing the functioning of the legal system, our body of legislation, our human resource strengths and weaknesses and the resource needs of the sector.

Our third key policy reform area is reform to the civil service to drive improved productivity and good governance. Good governance in the civil service ensures trust and public confidence in the State and improves performance and service delivery.

Significant civil service reforms have already been undertaken including the establishment of the Civil Service Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Audit Chamber under the Higher Administrative, Tax and Audit Court. However, a new round of reform is necessary to build a culture of accountability and a civil service able to meet the challenges of our future.

The Government is embarking on a reform program that focuses on improving human resource management including performance management and merit based promotions, improving knowledge of and adherence to civil service values including professionalism, responsiveness and impartiality and establishing frameworks to measure productivity and the achievement of results.

The Government has already taken the first steps towards reforming the civil service by reviewing its legal framework and appointing a new President and two new Commissioners to the Civil Service Commission. Working together with the Civil Service Commission we will make reforms to improve service delivery, instil a culture of performance and responsiveness and build a civil service we can all be proud of.

Ladies and gentlemen

The new Government has an ambitious agenda but we are determined and we are very committed to bringing about change. We also know that we cannot do it alone and that we need to work with all the institutions of the State, civil society, the people and of course our development partners to achieve success.

I would like to thank all of you for joining us today and for working with us to achieve our national priorities aimed at improving the lives of our people. Our successes in national development are also your successes and we thank you for your friendship and support.

I would also like to thank the international community for its solidarity at this time of mourning for our country. At the funeral yesterday, we said farewell to a national hero, Fernando La Sama de Araújo. Not only did La Sama do so much for his nation, but he touched so many of us personally. He was as kind as he was brave. I would like to thank you for mourning with us and for the respect you have shown to this great man.

I know that with his spirit of sacrifice and commitment to the Timorese people, we can work together to realise the promise of a better future for our country.

Thank you very much

Dr Rui Maria de Araújo
6 June 2015