



Keynote address by His Excellency
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On the occasion of the
Asia Society Australasia Centre and Department of Immigration
and Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs
Harmony Day Luncheon

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NATION BUILDING

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Chairman, Council for Multicultural Australia

Mr. Hugh Morgan AC
Chairman, Asia Society Australasia Centre

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a great pleasure to be here to share with you some thoughts about Nation Building in Timor-Leste.

Many people have asked me if the independence experienced today represents the vision and the ideals that I fought for. My answer has always been this is the Independence which I yearned for in terms of ideals as well as vision.

Only that the reality of being an independent country, in our case, carries difficulties and enormous challenges not only for those who govern but also for the whole population.

The building of a nation is a process and the process itself will, of course, take time. Whether short or long term it depends on the policies and programs of those who are tasked with the responsibility to produce.

Timor-Leste is in this situation. The post-conflict situation nourishes the psychological basis of the feelings and experiences of the people, because violence and destruction left imprints on the body and soul of our people.

It is normal that, in post-conflict situations, trauma (supposedly collective, as in the whole society) is emphasised as the worst thing to be confronted, as though it is a 'sine qua non' condition for the resurrection of the people for the new process.

And when we speak about reconciliation it is almost a crime not to speak of justice and many argue that it clashes with ethics and morals (in relation to justice for the sake of justice), which the activists – that once we were a part of – today uphold as the sword of human rights.

Reconciliation is an important factor, be it at a national level or, above all, at the community level. But it is not the fundamental factor that many may think it is.

We lose the notion of Nation building in the complexity of its problems and limit the process to a factor that is not ever lasting, that is not incurable.

Community building is the fundamental factor of nation building. Moreover, it is only by implementing democratic processes of local governance that participatory democracy will become an invigorating reality for the people and stimulate new energy for the holistic development of the nation. Democracy should be experienced daily by the people, in solving their problems, in the implementation of their own programs and the revitalisation of their own capacities to think and act.

With the election of chiefs at different levels of the community starting at village level, we will be establishing a collective responsibility, in terms of duties and rights. The participation will arise in the discussion of their problems, in the search for a common solution that will suit all. As a result, a new consciousness will thrive from the willingness to build, from the energy to move forward and the dynamics to innovate. And each community will feel linked to its neighbouring community and consequently, forming

widespread chains of relationships which strengthen, in terms of solidarity and in terms of co-ordination and co-operation.

This should be the dynamics of the unifying force that we target. And, in turn, this will create in itself, a new mentality of citizenship, a citizenship which contemplates rights but, above all, individual and collective duties. No one will feel left out of the process, no one will be a passive agent in the nation building. Today, the cries of the widows and orphans are still invoked to argue the existence of trauma, as are the frustrations of those who suffered in one way or the other. The notion of the value of the sacrifice has been lost; the commitment, which led everyone to accept the sacrifices demanded to liberate our Homeland, is in danger of being lost. The noble ideal that mobilised all is lost.

The foundations of 'nationhood' will only be created when there is genuine participation arising from the communities towards their own development. Some say, jokingly, that we can become, for example, another Singapore; but I would like to avoid such a miscalculation, which is more materialistic than of a human dimension that should take into account the individual and collective respect of our People. Of course the development of Timor-Leste does not have to be 'sui generis', but it can and should include the structural elements of our identity, so that we are not ashamed of being Timorese.

Ladies and gentlemen

The transition to independence was not easy, but it allowed us to reflect on the one hand, the burden of the enormous responsibility and, on the other, the relationship between Timor-Leste and the international community and, above all, with the donors whom, today, we call partners.

The challenges are great and can be condensed in the motto that is now common to developing and under developed countries: 'poverty reduction'. 'Poverty reduction' is a very simple concept when approached in academic dissertations, but it is much more complex when one attempts to convert it into energetic action to this end.

Education is referred to as the fundamental element to 'reduce poverty'. Once fortnightly, I meet with dozens of people, mothers, widows, youths, orphans, men, elderly, who raise and present their difficulties to me: be it the fact that they have no means of subsistence,

or no jobs, or no roof, or mostly, they cannot pay their children's school fees. Just try to imagine: one Australian dollar, per month, per child in prep and primary school. Even this, they cannot afford to pay and this is the problem!

Therefore I conclude that, as a long-term objective, yes, education is paramount in reducing poverty. In the Human Development Report 2002, published by UNDP, the indicators of poverty for Timor-Leste were:

- Infant mortality rate of 80 in every 1000 live births;
- Adult literacy rate of 43%, with 46% of the population having never attended school, resulting in a large inexperienced and unskilled work force;
- More than two out of five people live on or less than 55 US cents a day;
- Life expectancy is only 57 years; and
- GDP per capita is less than USD 500, with a GDP of USD 380 million.

Today, the majority of our people still practice subsistence agriculture with extremely rudimentary means of production. Given that, there are no established mechanisms for the purchase, processing and distribution of products, villagers try to produce for their own subsistence as, in the broad sense, they overcome the need to purchase what they can produce, even though it is insufficient for their annual consumption need.

It is in this sense that, in the short and medium term, it is more important, I would even say crucial, to have a clear program for the development of the economic sector. Only the development of the economic sector can enable, per se, a gradual yet genuine and tangible advance of the social sector.

However, what type of economy does one want for Timor-Leste? What type of development does one want to achieve? Do we want one that takes a sudden leap towards the industrialisation of the country? Nowadays, another common motto is the concept of 'sustainable development'. To what extent do we understand sustainability when it comes to economic projects in Timor-Leste? - these are some of the questions still to be answered.

Our people have already expressed their vision for 2020; an ambitious vision but very tenuous! I say very tenuous, because it was merely idealised in terms of improving living standards. So, what meaning does this vision encompass? It has an exceptional value in

that it expresses the great desire of parents to change the future of their children moving away from the current range of insecurity that they still face today.

There is need for a plan of action, focussed towards agriculture based on greater diversity and quantity of production and, focussed on encouraging small and medium industries, to be the basis of Timorese economy. As from now, it is fundamental to define self-sufficiency as the objective to achieve in the medium term. Timor-Leste is a small country, we are not numerous as a people, and therefore, it is easier to have the ambition of organising from our territorial land use to the rural urbanisation and the basic infrastructures that may foster the conditions for a greater popular participation in their own development.

In this context, where can we fit in the role played by foreign investment? Potentially one can say that there is an array of opportunities: from fisheries to tourism, in the agricultural field itself, in the building of infrastructure, and so forth.

Where does the importance of foreign investment lie? In technology and, obviously, in the capital that enters the country. On the one hand, foreign investment will provide the role of giving the youth an opportunity for vocational training, thereby helping to resolve the problem of unemployment. It is said, and with reason, that our domestic market will not be an incentive factor for foreign investment. But I believe in the possibility of looking towards a market beyond Timor-Leste.

In reality, in Timor-Leste, we still lack the conditions to attract foreign investment, both in terms of infrastructure and in terms of legal framework. Likewise, there is also the need to better understand the meaning of 'incentives for the investor' and 'national interests'; I believe that members of the Government and Timorese legislators are committed to clarifying such issues.

I am neither an economist nor a planner; therefore, it is within this simple framework that I also raise the issue of Australian investment. I have received business people, from all over, who have expressed their willingness to invest in Timor-Leste. I have given them all this same information, urging them to assess for themselves, the opportunities that interest them the most. They usually raise questions on security and stability and my response has been the same: Come and let us build stability together, because it cannot be imposed with the enactment of a law but rather, it is created and preserved when everyone has ensured a livelihood.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is a perception that we are situated between Australia and Indonesia. In the real map, we are linked to Indonesia, by land, and we have Australia to the south, separated by sea. In the experience arising from our relations Indonesia is a developing country, coming out of an economic crisis but selling us products that are less expensive than the Australian ones and Australia is a developed country and, at the same time, a donor.

In the process of building our nation we must also take into account the bilateral relations between the governments of Australia and of Timor-Leste, without speaking of the relations intrinsic to the Timor Sea. We all believe in the continuing commitment of the Australian government in supporting a development process in Timor-Leste that truly responds to the fundamental needs of our people.

Nevertheless, I must state that the government-to-government bilateral relationship does not meet all the needs. During the long resistance period, we were the recipients of an unforgettable psychological experience of solidarity from Peoples around the world; it gave us strength and courage to remain steadfast. After the Black September 1999, the vast humanitarian assistance brought to Timor-Leste was most crucial to the people, who felt that they were not forgotten in that period of grief.

However, after the emergency period, because not all the population was conveniently assisted and being aware of the timeframe for the political process under UNTAET, the concern began to be that the international community would abandon us. Already then, there was a need to look at the remaining International Agencies and NGOs as indispensable sources to continue the assistance to the population, where the arms of the government could not reach and this happened almost everywhere.

The Government still faces the hardships of a difficult beginning in every field. Therefore, at this point, I must stress the importance of the relations between the two peoples, between the communities of both our countries.

There are plenty of initiatives in this sense, proof of the solidarity and, above all, the affection of the Australian people. We have received immense assistance from State Governments, humanitarian groups, such as Rotary and others, including schools and children. The 'friendship city' project began in 2000, in various towns of Timor-Leste

such as the City of Liechhardt with Maliana, City of Port Phillip with Suai, City of Brisbane with Oecusse, and many others.

For example, in Suai, due to the lack of rain, there was almost no food production in last year's second season and in the recent rainy season. In November last year, because of the hunger that was spreading, I took dozens of tons of rice, corn and beans to that region.

Although the population needed the food, they simply told me: "President, we would rather you had brought us water".

I know that Port Phillip in Victoria, is thinking of sending water pumps to extract water to be channelled to the farms and rice paddies of the population of the friendship city Suai.

It is important to continue encouraging such magnificent initiatives. I must confess and with certain feeling of guilt and shame, that I have not adequately followed the development of these initiatives.

Allow me to say that there seems to be a factor that slightly delays the implementation of the good faith programs of the Australian cities. This factor is the lack of better organization on the part of the Timorese counterparts at district level. To overcome this, I believe that when people have an occupation that allows them to provide for their families, the social dimension of human nature will emerge instinctively and lead people to help and organise others less privileged.

I am of the opinion that we could look into the possibility of holding a meeting in Dili between the representatives of the Australian cities with their partners in the districts of Timor-Leste and, together establish a programmatic vision taking into account the relations and needs of each place and / or community.

Only a collective perception of, on one hand, what is being pledged and, on the other hand, what needs to be met, can induce the efforts of those who are less bold. This is the way ties between the communities can be felt in practice by all the population and not merely by some people or groups.

Obviously, this type of partnership also contemplates the entrepreneurial sector, which will not operate merely based on a share or benefit distribution but, above all, will dignify

human relations and strengthen the feelings of solidarity and friendship between Peoples and, concurrently, between governments and nations.

In relation to State Governments, as in here as well as from Victoria to the Northern Territory, there are magnificent examples of solidarity. In a spirit of continuity of this commitment, I have brought with me concrete examples of situations where solidarity can be directed to achieve concrete results:

We have two vocational schools, in Dili, one, informal and the other, formal, receiving however some adults in non formal technical training.

I visited the two sites and found, that they lack necessary technical equipment to provide adequate training. I have the list of these needs if a good samaritan can help.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Among us are distinguished individuals from the Asia Society Australasia Centre, such as Mr. Richard Woolcott and Hugh Morgan, AC. We also have with us Mr. Benjamin Chow, Chairman of the Council for Multicultural Affairs and Mr. Bill Farmer, Secretary from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

Here, today, I wish to appeal to the sensibility of the Australian authorities, in particular to the Prime Minister, of the difficult problem of East Timorese residing in Australia, whose status of asylum seekers is no longer relevant given that Timor-Leste is now free, democratic and peaceful country. However, I believe there is a need to consider a new status for them with the possibility of being allowed to a welcome stay in Australia.

In my point of view, one thousand and six hundred Timorese living in Australia will not incur great hardship on the Australian economy. The Timor Sea Agreement signed between Canberra and Dili, will bring lateral benefits of great proportions to Australia.

These 1600 Timorese in Timor-Leste will not cause a drain to our economy, as it still lacks a basis to develop. These 1600 Timorese will merely constitute another 1600 mouths that we are unable to feed, dozens of more families that we are unable to shelter. This is the heart of the problem from which I appeal to the goodwill and generosity of the Australian people, and the States where the Timorese live and above all the Federal

Government to consider this issue within the spirit of mutual understanding and co-operation.

Thank you.

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