



PRESIDENCIA DA REPÚBLICA
GABINETE DO PRESIDENTE

STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE
NOBLE PEACE PRIZE LAUREATE 1996
DR. JOSÉ RAMOS-HORTA

“On Poverty and the MDGs in Timor-Leste”

NEW YORK, 25 SEPTEMBER 2008

Mr. President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations, Excellencies and Dignitaries,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this forum on the Millennium Development Goals. Achieving these goals by eliminating extreme poverty will provide a real basis for major improvements so the people of Timor-Leste can live in dignity, enjoy the fruits of stability and peace. I have determined these as the core priority of my mandate as President of Timor-Leste.

As a young country, Timor-Leste had a late start in adopting and implementing the MDG process. Despite strides in democratization, the violent events of 2006 interrupted our march towards the Millennium Development Goals. This compounded decades of deprivations from the colonial and illegal occupation period. School enrollment is lower compared to 2004, child malnutrition is prevalent and poverty indicators are up. We are faced with a considerable lack of human resource capacity. Overall progress in meeting the MDG goals has clearly been limited so far.

However, this year has seen some positive developments, mainly in the return of IDPs from the 2006 crisis; 22 out of 29 IDP camps have been closed. Cash transfers were made to vulnerable groups, including the elderly. Clear targets were set for improving basic health and education through the 2008 National Priority Program. Timor-Leste is still considered as a country with less prevalence on HIV / Aids and has recently revised its National Strategic Plan against the pandemic. As a nation of 1 million, we have a challenging future ahead of us. There are still 30,000 IDPs living in squalid tents and more than 50% of our rapidly growing population is children below the age of 18, who are facing a small labor market.

With the creation of the Economic Stabilization Fund, Timor-Leste demonstrated its willingness to set the nation on a measured but firm path to development. It is based on sound management on Timor-Leste's oil revenues since 2005 as a benefit for present and future generations. External shocks from soaring global food prices, fuel costs, and also the effects of climate change require a buffering. As a signatory to major international environmental treaties, our country is committed to environmental sustainability. International support is needed as climate change can erode any achievements of Millennium Development Goals.

My Government is keenly aware of the link between peace, stability and poverty reduction. We reaffirm our commitment to meeting at least some of the MDG targets in the fastest possible way, particularly in education, health and gender. Let me give you an example of how serious we are in achieving this goal,

drawing on the close partnership we have been experiencing from donors and the UN. Responding to their genuine solidarity as a member of the international community, Timor-Leste (a least developed country) has started to help other countries overcome hardships. Apart from donating emergency relief to victims of Tsunami in Indonesia, Timor-Leste will contribute \$1 million in support of the work of both UNICEF and UNHCR globally, in 2009. In *per capita ratio*, this amount would further exceed the assistance that has been provided by many developed countries.

In closing, let me appeal to all of us in this forum: developing countries should spend less money on buying weapons, and developed countries should try to sell less weapons to poor countries, which only helps to perpetuate conflicts and wars and stops world's progress towards development. Globally, more resources should go to poverty eradication, basic education, health, water and sanitation, and HIV/ AIDS. Only then, we could see the light at the end of the tunnel for countries trying to achieve the MDG targets by 2015. Only then, will we be able to state that it was worthwhile to set such Goals!

I thank you