



**Remarks by H. E. José Ramos-Horta
President of Timor-Leste
And Nobel Peace Prize Laureate**

On

***Human Impact of Climate Change,*
Global Humanitarian Forum 2009
Geneva, 23-24th June 2009**

Mr. and Mrs. Annan, Presidents, Your Highness, Ministers, Eminent scientists, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to be here in the midst of some of the best minds of the world to listen to you all on the Human Impact of Climate Change. I thank H. E. Kofi Annan for being so kind in inviting me to participate in this forum. I don't know whether I can add much to the volumes of credible, scientific and verifiable data on the ground about this growing human calamity. But here I am in response to H. E. Kofi Annan's kind invitation.

My country, Timor-Leste, attained full sovereignty only seven years ago and it was Kofi Annan who presided over the nation-building of Timor-Leste, with vision and compassion, from 1999 to 2002. To him and the late Sergio Vieira De Mello, his Special Representative for Timor-Leste from 1999 to 2002, goes our eternal gratitude.

Timor-Leste fits in the category of Least Developed Countries (LDC), post-conflict, vulnerable, fragile States. This says all. The challenges we face since 2002 are no different from those faced by many others who have been on the world stage far longer – weak state institutions with very limited delivery capacity, an inexperienced Public Administration, lack of modern infrastructures like first class roads, bridges, reliable power supply, efficient and affordable telecommunications, hospitals, schools, doctors and teachers. Literacy is still very low particularly among women and girls.

However, we have also made significant progress. We have come a long way in reconciling among ourselves, healing the wounds of the past, and reconciling with those who were at another trench. Our relations with Indonesia are exemplary and I would say no two countries locked in a long bitter conflict have reconciled so fast and so thoroughly as Timor-

Leste and Indonesia. But we have also reconciled with the powers that be that contributed directly to our suffering with the provision of weapons to the much detested regime.

Our economy grew 12.5% in 2008 and 8% the previous year. We expect a continuing strong growth this year.

We are a modest oil and gas producing country with revenues totaling no more than US\$100 million/monthly. More fields are being found that will double our country's petroleum revenues in the next few years.

In 2005 we established a Petroleum Fund, governed by the strictest rules of good management and oversight.

And we must be the only country in the world that did not suffer any loss as all our petroleum revenues were invested in the relatively safe US Treasury Bonds. We also do not have a single cent owing to anyone.

We are fully self-funded in terms of our National Budget which in 2009 is close to US\$700 million. You should know that in 2002 when we attained full independence our State Budget was a mere US\$68 million and some 40% were financed by donors.

We cannot complain of lack of financial resources and generous international donor assistance even if often the so-called aid is not entirely targeted on job creation, poverty alleviation, food security, rural development.

Much of the aid money is spent on consultants, study missions, reports and recommendations. Some 3,000 studies and reports have been done on us. We have been psycho-analysed from every possible angle.

However, the reality is that poverty is still widespread; unemployment is high worsened by a very high birth rate and a young population.

Now let me turn on to the topic of this conference. I begin by saying that while I was impressed by the quality of the information available from the Global Humanitarian Forum and the eloquence of the speakers we heard yesterday and today, I am not at all convinced that leaders of the powers that be are going to take imaginative and courageous steps in saving our planet. Let me repeat: I do not believe.

Let me explain the reasons for my lack of hope and faith.

I ask, how many industrial countries have responded to the UN appeal first made some 20 years ago to allocate 0,7% of their national income for development assistance to poor countries? Only four small Nordic countries have done so.

There is never money to assist the poor but there is always money to wage wars and to rescue banks and insurance companies bankrupted by corrupt, and incompetent and highly paid CEOs.

How many countries have agreed to open up their markets, tariff free, for goods from developing countries? The rich advocate an almost borderless world for trade but they

heavily subsidized their farmers and industries and imposed restrictive rules on agriculture imports from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

How many weapons producing countries have acknowledged the immorality and danger of conventional weapons sales to developing countries, in particular, to regions in conflict and have reduced such exports?

How many armed nuclear countries have begun to destroy their nuclear arsenal?

All of the above affect them, affect us. Weapons sold to one side of a conflict will always end in the wrong side, sooner or later. We are all worried about nuclear devices, biological and chemical weapons, ending up in the hands of non-state actors. But there is no sign of anyone trying to simply eliminate this possibility by clearing the world from such weapons.

In view of the above, I have no illusions that in Copenhagen we are going to see imaginative and swift action to commit all to save our planet. There might be a consensus document, there might be even a solid one that everyone will applaud and walk away declaring victory. But will there be commitment in action to implement the pledges and binding norms and targets? Will there be enough funding for developing countries to deal with current impact of climate change?

Will there be enough money, no restrictions attached, and no bureaucratic delays, for poor developing countries to assist them in dealing with the consequences of decades of irresponsible greed of few?

We are all too familiar with the infamous pledges made by the rich in pledging conferences but do not deliver on their commitments.

We in the developing world are responsible for less than 1% of global emissions of green gases. But we are the ones who are paying a high price for the greed and irresponsibility of the rich few and we will pay even more.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In view of the above, as I see waters rising, floods surging, lands sliding, rain patterns changing, followed by prolonged droughts, I will say, I cannot just hope for others to do something about it.

We can continue to denounce the rich for their greed and irresponsibility, but we must try to do small things, actually big things, with our own resources and hands, to save our own countries, our rivers and lakes, our seas and corals.

We must stop logging and destroying our forests, we must plant millions of trees, preserve rain water and rivers; we must stop dumping plastics and other non-degradable and toxic materials into our rivers and seas; we must prevent over fishing and the depletion of our fish stock.

If we do this in every country, every island, and in every tropical region from the Amazon basin to the Coral Triangle, we will mitigate the impact of climate change; we might not have to witness the disappearance of some islands, peoples and cultures in the next decades.

We heard yesterday the moving speech by the President of Kiribati. I was almost in tears when he told us how his people might have to resettle elsewhere as their islands disappear in the next decades, in our life time.

Islanders and indigenous peoples are deeply attached to the land more than any other community. Let us pause and imagine the profound sadness, trauma, emotional distress of those who are forced to live their ancestral islands because they are sinking, disappearing under the rising sea.

They will not be the only climate change refugees. In the next 30 to 50 years they will be joined by tens of millions from Asia to Africa. And as they move to safer and higher grounds there will be conflicts with others already there, all fighting for scarce land and water.

I do not assign all blame to the rich and the powerful. Maybe what we are experiencing today is an inevitable consequence of the development of human mind, of science, technology and industrialization. We could not have told the people in the XVIII Century that they should not build factories and power them with coal and fossil fuel; we could not tell them not to manufacture the locomotive, ships, cars, tractors, and later airplanes.

Life was simpler, there were fewer people some millions of years or just even 500 years ago. Now we are six billion people sharing a shrinking planet with shrinking resources.

So let us cherish the resources we have in each country, each island, each village, and we might still have enough for all. We might still save our planet. We might.

In my own country we have launched programs to reduce poverty, create jobs and preserve the environment and consolidate peace.

With the government we have launched a clean city campaign where everyday Friday morning thousands of civil servants are mobilized to clean the city and neighborhoods, clear the clogged canals, rivers and beaches.

We have launched the “Dili – City of Peace” campaign to turn our city and the whole country into an Island of Peace. My concept of peace is that peace must start at home, within the family, in the schools, in the streets.

Peace must mean end of domestic violence against women and children. Peace must mean that we care about our elderly, the handicapped, HIV victims, the poorest of the poor.

Peace means that we must be a model of solidarity and share our resources with other peoples in need.

Even though we are a very new country with limited resources we made contributions to peoples in China, Cuba, Burma and Indonesia affected by natural disasters with a total grant close to US\$2 million so far.

So I repeat let's start in our own homes to try to save our common planet.

May God the Almighty and the Merciful Bless Us All.