

FORUM ONG TIMOR LESTE THE TIMOR LESTE NGO FORUM



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Open Letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations

His Excellency Dr. Antonio Guterres

29 August 2024

Your Excellency,

The Timor-Leste NGO Forum (FONGTIL) and all its members are pleased to welcome the visit of Your Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr. Antonio Guterres, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the 1999 popular consultation with the people of Timor-Leste. This celebration recognizes the struggle and victory of the people of Timor-Leste and the international community, particularly the United Nations. Each of us must continue to fight for freedom, social justice, democracy and self-determination globally to create a peaceful and just world.

FONGTIL would also like to thank Dr. Antonio Guterres and the people of Portugal for their support during Timor-Leste's struggle against the illegal occupation by Indonesia. Our State will offer its medal as a symbol of gratitude, and our people would like to express their gratitude through this letter.

This visit is an opportunity for reflection, to think about the suffering, struggle, and victory of each of us. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the progress by Timor-Leste since independence, and the challenges that remain. Timor-Leste's development over the past two decades has made significant progress, but we still struggle with many fundamental problems, including poverty, malnutrition, petroleum dependence, import dependence, lack of quality public services, climate change and other urgent issues.

We appreciate that the United Nations and its agencies continue to help Timor-Leste strengthen education, health, agriculture, governance and other sectors. As an independent state, Timor-Leste has made good progress since the Indonesian occupation; including holding many free and democratic elections, although we still face many challenges. Although we have freedom of expression, press, movement and assembly, the security authorities continue to try to limit this liberty; for example, before the visits of your Excellency and His Holiness, the Prime Minister and the police warned some of our members not to express themselves. Timor-Leste has some savings resulting from oil and gas extraction which finance most of the state's activities, although the resources are neither sufficient nor unsustainable.

Regarding justice and accountability, unfortunately, Indonesian criminal actors have not yet been brought to a credible judicial mechanism which can help end impunity in the region and the world. With the help of the United Nations, a special panel for serious crimes was set up for crimes committed in 1999, but its mandate did not cover the numerous crimes by Indonesian forces from 1975 through 1998. To date, no Indonesian political or military leaders have been brought to justice, even as they increase their political power in our closest neighbor.

We are also concerned that the United Nations system has not yet effectively supported the State of Timor-Leste to create an appropriate and sustainable development policy. Although Timor-Leste

has its “National Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030”, that document only spells out an unrealistic dream for our overall environment and does not directly address many of the real challenges faced by our population. We encourage the United Nations to use its available financial, human resources and capacity to help Timor-Leste to move in a sustainable and equitable direction. This help should respect the political sovereignty of Timor-Leste; we do not suggest interference with national sovereignty, but only that political, economic and social assistance can help move and sustain Timor-Leste in a better direction.

Timor-Leste has appropriate state institutions and sovereign bodies to design national policy to build an equitable and sustainable society. Timor-Leste also has strong, independent, civil society movements which are strategic partners for national development and further progress.

We are very grateful for the efforts of the Secretary-General and some members of the international community to address the climate crisis, which has affected people’s lives in Timor-Leste and around the world. Unfortunately, major greenhouse gas producers have not yet acted effectively to curtail the emissions that are the principal cause of climate change.

As a small country in a precarious situation, Timor-Leste is very vulnerable to climate change impacts, On 4 April 2021, Cyclone Seroja caused great destruction and killed dozens of our citizens, damaging infrastructure and people's wealth, which is just one example of climate change impacts. Timor-Leste is also facing this climate crisis in many aspects – extreme heat, rising seas, droughts, flooding, landslides, unpredictable agricultural conditions and dying marine ecosystems -- which affect both human lives and biodiversity.

We encourage Your Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations to continue to strive to reduce emissions into the atmosphere, restore the environment from destruction and ensure a safe and peaceful world.

FONGTIL is aware that this destruction results from the actions of large and rich nations to maximize their economic benefit. FONGTIL encourages the United Nations and the international community as a whole to take stronger, more effective actions to avert the climate crisis, lessen its consequences and provide reparations for those most affected.

FONGTIL also appreciates the Secretary-General's calls for dialogue, cease-fire and resolution of conflicts and crises in Palestine and elsewhere.

FONGTIL also asks the United Nations and the International Community not to forget the peoples who struggle for freedom, including those in Western Sahara, Myanmar and West Papua, who continue to struggle for justice and human rights, especially for self-determination.

This concludes FONGTIL’s open letter to Your Excellency the Secretary-General, and we hope that Your Excellency will receive it and consider its content. Thank you.

With Our Respect,



(Valentim da Costa Pinto)
Executive Director of FONGTIL



Inocencio de Jesus Xavier
President of FONGTIL Fiscal Council