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Timor-Leste PM defends position



Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao

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Timor-Leste's Prime Minister has staunchly defended his government's position in the ongoing legal disputes with Australia over the Timor Sea Treaty, and with petroleum companies over tax obligations.

The government has been involved in these ongoing legal actions for some time, accusing Australia of covert operations during the Timor Sea Treaty negotiations.

In separate actions involving oil companies ConocoPhillips and Woodside, it seeks to justify the petroleum tax assessments that it presented to both companies.

Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao told parliament on 1 December that "smaller countries also have the right to react to acts of aggression against the state and to the rights of their people".

He said the arbitration case against Australia has been suspended for six months "and now we are undertaking work with the primary objective of protecting the legitimate interests of Timor-Leste and its people".

He accused the petroleum multinationals of "trying to seize the natural resources of the Timorese people, while paying less tax than what they were required to pay as well as making illicit deductions".

"We did not fight – and suffer and die – just to have an independent flag, but to be able to exercise and enjoy what is rightfully ours," added Gusmao.

