



REPÚBLICA DEMOCRÁTICA DE TIMOR-LESTE

GABINETE DO PRIMEIRO MINISTRO

STATEMENT

**BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER, KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT
GOALS REPORT 2009
3 April 2009**

Honorable Guests,
Maun Alin Inan Feto Sira,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here tonight and make a statement about the Millennium Development Goals in Timor-Leste. As a new member of the community of nations, Timor-Leste formally agreed to adopt the Millennium Declaration passed by 189 countries in September 2000.

In the Millennium Summit in 2000, I was there as an observer, witnessing the commitment made by world leaders to substantially reduce the number of people in absolute poverty by 2015.

Two years after that Summit, Timor-Leste became the world's newest sovereign State. The restoration of our independence on 20 May 2002 marked a new dawn for our people, but with significant social and economic challenges.

As most of you are aware, Timor-Leste launched its first report on the Millennium Development Goals in April 2004, taking stock of the situation in the country on the MDG Targets and Indicators, informing the People of Timor-Leste and the international community, and encouraging debate and advocacy.

The second report on the MDGs that I am about to launch tonight, quantifies how the country had progressed in terms of the MDGs up until 2007 and identifies what further actions remain to be taken.

As you will see in this report, Timor-Leste continues to face difficult challenges to tackle poverty and to achieve the MDGs. We have made important progress towards some of the eight Goals, but we are not on track to fulfill our commitments in others.

In terms of poverty, there had been little improvement for the people of Timor-Leste, particularly those who have limited or no education and work in agriculture. About 500 thousand Timorese live below the basic needs poverty line, which represents almost 50% of the total population.

The target set in 2004 to achieve the headcount ratio of 14% by 2015 has become even more challenging. Children as our most vulnerable are suffering with 50% being underweight in 2007. The poor economic and social conditions of our country have serious implications for child mortality rates. The figure of 130 deaths out of 1000 live births in 2004 was mainly due to common diseases such as respiratory infections, malaria and diarrheal illnesses.

Only 74% of children were enrolled for primary education in 2007. This will have a serious impact on future generations.

While it is yet to be confirmed by the next Demographic Health Survey in 2010, the maternal mortality ratio remains very high and the target of reducing to 252 per 100 thousand remains a big challenge for all of us. The Report also records that the prevalence of malaria in 2007 was 10%, and there had been little improvement in the treatment and prevention of the disease between 2001 and 2007. And the ratio of literate women to men aged 15-24 years, decreased from 97% in 2004 to 93% three years later.

The discrepancies between urban and rural areas, characterized by higher male literacy remains a significant challenge. The traditional male dominance is reflected in the low percentage of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector.

And the list goes on.

The poor living conditions, compounded by the adverse effects of the 2006 crisis and a food security crisis, have all affected our efforts to reduce poverty and hunger. The need to address these pressing issues, however, should not be seen as an excuse to detract us from our long-term efforts to achieve the MDGs.

We must continue to keep our focus on the MDGs as we confront these new challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to unequivocally reiterate my Government's commitment to achieving the MDGs. To that end, the Fourth Constitutional Government is preparing its Strategic Development Plan for the country under my leadership, which will contribute to achieving the MDGs.

As a latecomer, Timor-Leste may not be able to achieve all the targets, and as a result some of them, which were set in 2004, may need to be revised accordingly. In view of our current human and financial resources, Timor-Leste will need to be realistic about achieving the MDGs, with the prioritization of some Goals, as well as reaching an understanding of the time horizon needed for achieving others.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Government thanks the United Nations Integrated Mission for its key role in the preparation of this report.

And importantly, the second MDG Report will also contribute to strengthening the capacity of the National Statistics Directorate for monitoring and reporting on the MDGs.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The MDGs are focused on people and making their lives better. They allow us to measure our progress and they are achievable provided all of us continue to work hand-in-hand to help Timor-Leste work towards meeting our targets.

I, therefore, declare the official launch of the Millennium Development Goals Report 2009.

Thank you very much.