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Viewing cable 06DILI229, RAMOS-HORTA: WOULD ACCEPT PRIME MINISTER POSITION

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DILI229	2006-05-12 15:12	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Emb

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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0262
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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 0134
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 1845

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DEPT FOR EAP/MTS
NSC FOR HOLLY MORROW
PACOM FOR JOC, POLAD, J5

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/12/2016
TAGS: PGOV PHUM ASEC MARR TT
SUBJECT: RAMOS-HORTA: WOULD ACCEPT PRIME MINISTER POSITION

REF: (A) DILI 189; (B) DILI 203; (C) DILI 213; (D) DILI 219; (E) DILI 220;
DILI 226; (G) STATE 75819

DILI 0000229 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY: Grover Joseph Rees, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy
Dili, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Classified by Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees for reasons 1(b) & (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: In a conversation with Ambassador Rees, Foreign Minister Jose Ramos-Horta said he believes Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri will probably be defeated in next week's Fretilin Party Congress. He believes Alkatiri has brought the defeat upon himself by his arrogant and sometimes abusive behavior, and he expects that the likely new Fretilin Secretary General, Jose Luis Guterres, would ask Ramos Horta himself to replace Alkatiri as Prime Minister. Ramos-Horta said he would accept the Prime Minister position in order to lead a transitional government through the 2007 elections. The transitional government would not include Interior Minister Rogerio Lobato or deputy armed forces commander Colonel Lere, and it might include members of opposition parties as well as of Fretilin. Ramos-Horta does not

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believe there will be violence or civil disorder in the days leading up to the Fretilin convention, and he is confident that if Alkatiri were defeated neither he nor his supporters would attempt to retain power by force. Ramos-Horta also says he would reluctantly agree to lead a new Government in what he regards as the unlikely event of a constitutional/security crisis requiring the President to dismiss the Prime Minister. He predicts that in the aftermath of any such crisis, the President would have the support of the country's two Catholic Bishops and that these three public figures, together with Ramos-Horta himself, would be able to unify the country. Despite clearly having given serious thought to all these scenarios, Ramos-Horta told Ambassador he will spend most of his time in the next week trying to calm the population and to get leaders of various factions to talk to one another. Ambassador also delivered the demarche in Ref G and Ramos-Horta agreed with the points set forth therein. End summary.

¶2. (U) In a May 11 evening meeting with Ambassador, Ramos-Horta began with what sounded like the Alkatiri Government's party line: he has been traveling around the districts trying to listen to people's fears and to calm them; although the people are still afraid of recurring violence, there are in fact no armed groups preparing to attack Dili; he believes the Fretilin Congress will be held on schedule May 17-19; and, all things considered, the institutions of government are functioning reasonably well. He added that he is still unconvinced that there was a massacre in Dili and/or Tasitolu on April 28-30, but he believes the current Government of East Timor (GOET) investigation might not be regarded as credible and should be supplemented by a separate international investigation, preferably under United Nations auspices.

¶3. (S) When asked to predict the outcome of the Fretilin Congress, Ramos-Horta said "Alkatiri thinks he will win because he and his people chose the delegates. But he is overconfident. It's a secret ballot, and he has alienated too many people with his arrogant and abusive behavior." Ramos-Horta cited a recent public statement by Alkatiri that the many thousands of people fleeing Dili were going for a "picnic". He said the Prime Minister was "lucky there was so much going on that nobody focused on that remark. Can you imagine?" He also said Alkatiri has become inextricably associated with the extremely unpopular recent actions of elements of the armed forces (FDTL), and that even Fretilin party regulars who do not dislike him will vote against him because they believe Alkatiri's leadership could result in a Fretilin loss in the 2007 election. Asked about reports that key Alkatiri supporters were buying delegate votes, the Foreign Minister responded, "Yes, there is that. But I reminded Alkatiri that this is exactly what the Indonesian military thought, that they would win by money and pressure.

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When it came to the secret ballot, our people knew how to vote the way they wanted." (Note: Fretilin party rules require a secret ballot at the Congress for the election of the Secretary

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General.) Ramos-Horta said he regarded Alkatiri as an old and close friend and that "I really care about him. I wish things had turned out better for him. But he has done this to himself."

¶4. (S) Discussing Ambassador Jose Luis Guterres, Alkatiri's only announced opponent in the Secretary General election, Ramos-Horta said "Jose Luis is exactly the kind of person the country needs. He's smart and he's an idealist. He really believes in democracy. Everybody likes him. He would get along with opposition parties and with the Church, and his goal would be to unify the country." He said, however, that Ambassador Guterres has had little or no administrative experience, which is why he believes Guterres would prefer someone else to become Prime Minister while he concentrates on the 2007 campaign. He alluded to the possibility that Guterres could become President of Parliament, or perhaps run for President in 2007. Asked about the argument that some of Guterres' supporters were almost as unsavory as some of Alkatiri's supporters, Ramos-Horta responded to the effect that opportunists are beginning to support Guterres because they sense he is going to win.

Â¶5. (S) Asked whether Alkatiri or anyone close to him would attempt to retain power by force in the event they lost control of Fretilin and the party then moved to form a new Government, Ramos-Horta said he was confident this would not happen. Alkatiri would know when he was defeated --- and has repeatedly announced that he will immediately resign as Prime Minister if he should be defeated for re-election as Secretary General. Others, such as Colonel Lere and Minister Lobato, have no particular affection for Alkatiri and would attempt to survive within the new order.

Â¶6. (S) Ambassador asked Ramos-Horta whether, if Ambassador Guterres won the Fretilin contest and asked Ramos-Horta to become Prime Minister, he would accept. Ramos-Horta responded immediately, "Yes, I would. I would lead a transitional government lasting until the election. People might think this means I am an ambitious person, but in fact this is much more important than any chance I might have to become Secretary General of the United Nations. I would have the obligation to try to unify my country." Ramos-Horta said he would strongly consider including talented members of opposition parties in his new government. He also insisted that any government of which he (Ramos-Horta) was a part would have no place for Lobato. "He should have been fired years ago." He suggested that Colonel Lere --- assuming the investigations of the April 28-30 events do not implicate him in criminal behavior --- should be helped to find a life in the private sector.

Â¶7. (S) (Please strictly protect the information in this paragraph.) Finally, Ambassador asked Ramos-Horta what he would do if he were offered the Prime Ministership under more difficult circumstances. Suppose there were a recurrence of violence and disorder, perhaps with the involvement of elements of the police and military, and the President invoked his constitutional authority to dismiss the Prime Minister "when necessary to ensure the functioning of the democratic institutions". (See Ref F). This time Ramos-Horta paused for a moment, then responded, "I would have to accept." He reiterated that he thought this scenario extremely unlikely, but he indicated that he believed the President would only invoke this constitutional provision if things had really fallen apart. In this case, he presumed the President's action would also have the support of East Timor's two Catholic bishops, who Ramos-Horta believes represent the most important source of moral authority in the country. "It would be my responsibility to stand with the President and the Bishops and to work with them to unite the country."

Â¶8. (U) Ambassador also delivered the demarche set forth in Ref
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Â¶G. Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta responded that the points in the demarche closely reflected his own thinking and that he was confident the Prime Minister and the President would also abide by these principles.

Â¶9. (S) Today, May 12, Ambassador called Ramos-Horta for an update on various matters, and Ramos-Horta volunteered that "I had a good meeting with the President about the matters you and I discussed last night," presumably a reference to the possibility of a Ramos-Horta Prime Ministership in the event of Jose Luis Guterres were to prevail at the Fretilin Congress. He added that "we talked about these things for a long time" and that "the President has also had good discussions with Jose Luis about this."

Â¶10. (S) In the May 11 meeting and the May 12 telephone conversation, Ramos-Horta also discussed his visit earlier in the day on May 11 with Major Alfredo Reinado, the leader of dissident FDTL and police officers who are encamped in Aileu. See Ref D. Ramos-Horta said that tomorrow (May 13) he will drive to Aileu to pick up Major Reinado and drive him to President Gusmao's house in Balibar (in the mountains above Dili on the road to Aileu) where the three will have a conversation about the circumstances under which Reinado's group might agree to return to Dili. Ramos-Horta will accompany Reinado back and forth to Aileu as a guarantee of safe conduct.

Â¶11. (S) Comment: Although Ramos-Horta has always privately acknowledged that Prime Minister Alkatiri has weaknesses as well as strengths, his negative assesement in yesterday's conversation was stronger by orders of magnitude than any previous criticism he has offered. Like President Gusmao, Ramos-Horta appears to be pursuing a two-part strategy: do everything possible to avoid violence or unrest before and during the Fretilin Congress, and prepare for a smooth constitutional transition to a new Government if, as they expect, the Congress replaces Alkatiri with the more popular and conciliatory Guterres. This is a best-case scenario, not only because it would likely result in a speedy return to normal life in East Timor, but also because a government led by President Gusmao, Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta, and Ambassador Guterres would be far more committed than the Alkatiri government to human rights, genuinely participatory democracy, and other values and interests the people of East Timor share with the people of the United States. End Comment.
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