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## Timor-Leste Brings Maritime Dispute with Australia to United Nations

By Lyndal Rowlands



A view of the sea from the Timorese island of Atauro. Credit: Lyndal Rowlands / IPS

### UNITED NATIONS, Apr 14 2016 (IPS) -

Timor-Leste which won independence from Indonesia in 1999 is now engaged in a new struggle with Australia over rights to oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea.

Former Timorese Prime Minister and independence leader “Kay Rala” Xanana Gusmao met with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon here Wednesday to discuss his country’s plans to use the compulsory conciliation provisions under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to settle Timor-Leste’s maritime boundary dispute with Australia.

“We fought a long struggle for 24 years for our independence and for sovereignty over our land,

now we are in a new struggle to secure sovereign rights over our seas,” Gusmao told journalists after his meeting with Ban.

Gusmao said that Timor-Leste could not take Australia to the international courts because two-months before Timor-Leste gained independence Australia withdrew from the relevant binding jurisdiction. “They did this because they knew they were wrong,” he said.

Gusmao said that Australia took advantage of Timor-Leste’s vulnerability as a young and inexperienced nation to enter into an unfair agreement over the maritime boundaries between the two countries.

The boundaries have a significant impact on the half-island nation’s economy due to revenues from oil and gas reserves in the disputed area.

The Timorese government uses the money raised from oil and gas revenues to provide essential services to its young population. Sixty percent of Timor-Leste’s 1.2 million people are aged under 25 years of age and the country continues to struggle on key development indicators, including hunger. According to the UN Children’s Fund, UNICEF, malnutrition is major concern for Timor-Leste with 44.7 percent of children under five years old underweight.

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