

Diplomatic sources: Xanana absent from signing treaty with Australia

Lusa, March 05, 2018 (unofficial translation)

Xanana Gusmão, who led the Timor-Leste team negotiating the new maritime border treaty with Australia, is not expected to attend the ceremony to sign the historic document, diplomatic sources confirmed to Lusa.

“His participation in the New York ceremony was scheduled, but we received the information that he will not participate,” a source told Lusa. The information was later confirmed by other sources in New York and Dili.

None of the sources explained the reasons for Xanana Gusmão’s absence from the signing of the document, which will take place at 5 pm on Tuesday at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Last week, the Timorese government had already announced that, contrary to what was originally envisaged, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri would not attend the ceremony in New York.

At the time, the executive explained that the participation of Mari Alkatiri “made no sense” after it was officially confirmed that the head of the Australian Government would also not be present.

This week the executive issued a note clarifying that “after contacting the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste to the United Nations in New York, the Government of Australia did not intend to be represented at the signing of the maritime boundary delimitation agreement between Timor-Leste and Australia through its Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, but through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop.”

The absence of the two leaders comes after months of political tension between the Fretilin-led coalition government and the opposition led by Xanana Gusmão’s National Congress of Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT).

The tension led to the decision of President of the Republic Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo to dissolve the parliament and call for early elections.

If the two leaders had traveled to New York, it would have been the first meeting between them since Xanana Gusmão left Timor-Leste in September last year. The Timorese leader has not yet returned to the country.

The treaty will be signed by the current Deputy Prime Minister for Border Delimitation, Agio Pereira - representing Timor-Leste - and the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, representing Australia.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres and the chairman of the Conciliation Commission, Peter Taksøe-Jensen, who mediated the negotiations between the two countries, will witness the signing.

The agenda foresees that the two delegations will be present prior to the signing ceremony, followed by statements by the two signatories and the two witnesses, followed by a joint press conference.

The day will end with an official reception which will hear statements from Julie Bishop and Agio Pereira.

The treaty, whose exact contours are not yet known, puts the border line in the position defended by Timor-Leste, that is, equidistant from both countries, as Dili has always claimed, as sources who have participated in the talks confirmed to Lusa.

A line that the Portuguese colonial administration, the Indonesian occupiers and the Timor-Leste leaders have always argued should be placed where it will now be, and which formalizes the ownership of resources that up to now Timor-Leste has had to share with Canberra.

The treaty results from a test of the instruments of the Law of the Sea and, in particular, the Compulsory Conciliation Procedure (PCO).

It took eleven intense negotiation rounds, over 19 months, to reach an agreement that the most optimistic thought would take years and the most pessimistic ones found impossible.

The negotiations, with the support of a panel of five international experts and the assistance of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, took place under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Xanana Gusmão changes signing of boundary treaty for visit to Sierra Leone

Lusa, March 6, 2018, 3:48 PM -- Xanana Gusmão, who led the Timor-Leste team that negotiated the border treaty with Australia, will not participate in the signing ceremony of the historic document and chose not to travel to New York, but to Sierra Leone.

The visit, which had not been previously announced in Timor-Leste, was confirmed by a photo posted on the Twitter page of the National Elections Commission of Sierra Leone, where the official of the electoral body is seen with the former Timorese President.

“The head of the CNE, Mohamed Conteh, welcomes the former President of Timor-Leste, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão,” said the photo caption released today.

The visit comes on the eve of presidential, parliamentary and local elections.

The news of Xanana Gusmão’s non-participation in today’s ceremony in New York caused surprise in Dili, raising several comments on social networks, although there was no official reaction.

Diplomatic and political sources in Dili and New York have confirmed to Lusa that Xanana Gusmão will not be at the ceremony and no explanation has been given so far for the decision.

The treaty will be signed by the current Timorese Deputy Prime Minister for the Delimitation of Borders, Agio Pereira, and the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres and the chairman of the Conciliation Commission, Peter Taksøe-Jensen, who mediated the negotiations between the two countries, will witness the signing.

The agenda foresees that the two delegations will be present prior to the signing ceremony, followed by statements by the two signatories and the two witnesses, followed by a joint press conference.

The day will end with an official reception awaiting statements from Julie Bishop and Agio Pereira.

The treaty, whose exact contours are not yet known, puts the border line in the position defended by East Timor, that is, equidistant from both countries, as Dili has always claimed, according to Lusa sources confirmed that they participated in the negotiations.

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