



East Timor and Indonesia Action Network (ETAN)

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42 years after Timor-Leste declared independence, ETAN honors and encourages peaceful democracy

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Next Tuesday, on November 28th, the people of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste will celebrate the 42nd anniversary of their Declaration of Independence. For the last 26 of those years, the U.S.-based East Timor and Indonesia *Action Network* (ETAN) has supported their struggle for self-determination. We stand in solidarity with all the people of Timor-Leste, and do not favor any political party or leader.

The Timorese people are currently facing a challenging time, as an opposition coalition in parliament challenges the current government's right to govern. We encourage everyone to put the national interest above personal and partisan interests and to adhere to the Constitution, law, and democratic principles. ETAN is confident in the strength of Timor-Leste's democratic institutions and in its people's commitment to stability, democracy and justice.

While politicians and commentators in Dili debate legal interpretations and jockey for power, the other 99% of the Timorese people are trying to live from day to day. They depend on public services like education, health care and safety. Many still lack decent livelihoods and adequate food. We encourage those in Government, Parliament and political parties to design, improve, and carry out programs to strengthen and diversify Timor-Leste's economy, minimize poverty, decrease unemployment and malnutrition, reduce inequalities, and eliminate corruption.

Addressing these challenges will be the key to long-term stability for the country. We also encourage every official, public servant and citizen to attend to people's lives and families, without being distracted or paralyzed by rumors, partisan maneuvering or anxiety about politics.

The President of the Republic will play a key role in resolving this political impasse, which we hope is over soon. We appreciate the calm way he is carrying out his duties under the Constitution, and we hope that he will continue to promote dialogue among political leaders, elected officials, civil society, ordinary citizens, and others to find the best solution for the entire nation. We were encouraged by the President's recent meeting with rural women leaders, and hope to see more women included fully in political discussions, including at the highest levels of political leadership.

Many people in Timor-Leste have traumatic memories of the brutal Indonesian occupation, as well as of the intra-Timorese conflicts of 2002 and 2006. However, people have learned from that history, as demonstrated by the largely peaceful last decade. We appreciate the moderation, restraint, and adherence to law currently exercised by nearly all citizens and by Timor-Leste's police and military, and we expect that this will continue. Although political rhetoric has sometimes been confrontational, it has not escalated to physical violence. We hope that the leaders and people of Timor-Leste continue to show their commitment to peaceful, democratic processes in a sovereign nation.

During the last 500 years, the small nation of Timor-Leste has often been oppressed, manipulated or exploited by international actors. We urge foreign powers to allow the Timorese people to work out their own problems without outside interference, even as we show our solidarity by encouraging Timor-Leste to follow a peaceful, fair and democratic path.

Today, most people in the United States are celebrating Thanksgiving, a day to be grateful for the good people and things in our lives. We also recall the shameful history of European colonization, especially the genocide of Native Americans.

ETAN also gives thanks for the sovereignty, democracy and peace that currently prevails in Timor-Leste, but we do not forget the shameful colonization and occupation which foreign invaders, some supported by the United States government, inflicted on your people. We recommit ourselves to improve democratic practices in the United States and to work for policies which secure human rights, end impunity, and achieve social and economic justice for both our peoples. Timor-Leste has made more progress in 42 years than the United States has in 241, but both nations have a long way to go, and ETAN looks forward to the continuing journey.

