

UN MISSION IN TIMOR-LESTE EXTENDED FOR ANOTHER 12 MONTHS

On 25 February 2008, the Security Council, by its resolution 1802 (2008) extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) for one year, until 26 February 2009, at the current authorized levels*.

This resolution was adopted in the wake of the 11 February attacks on Timor-Leste President José Ramos-Horta (who was seriously injured) and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão (who escaped uninjured). The violent events shook the country and shocked the international community. At the consultations of the Security Council on 11 February, the Council, in its Presidential statement (S/PRST/2008/5), condemned "in the strongest possible terms" those acts as an attack "on the legitimate institutions of Timor-Leste." The Council called on the Government to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks and appealed to the people of Timor-Leste to remain calm, exercise restraint and maintain stability in the country. The Council reaffirmed its full support to the Government and people of Timor-Leste in their continued efforts to strengthen democracy and ensure public security and maintain stability in the country, as well as for the work of UNMIT and for the continued deployment of the international security force in response to the requests of the Government of Timor-Leste.

In introducing the Secretary-General's report on UNMIT (S/2008/26) of 17 January 2008, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, briefed the Council on 21 February. He said that it is reassuring that, following the 11 February events, the Timor-Leste Government, the Parliament, all political parties (including in the opposition), security institutions, and the population at large responded with calm and restraint and with due respect for the Constitution and the rule of law. Since the attacks, the Government, in close cooperation with UNMIT, had shown leadership in guiding and coordinating security operations. "What some feared might have deteriorated into a destabilizing crisis did not transpire, with the institutions of State and the citizens showing strong resilience," Mr. Guéhenno said, adding that the incidents raised some serious security-related issues which will need to be addressed.

In the next 12 months, UNMIT, in partnership with the Timorese, will continue focusing efforts on the four priority areas outlined in the Secretary-General's report: review and reform of the security sector, strengthening of the rule of law, economic and social development, and promoting a culture of democratic governance.

UNMIT police continued to perform the task of interim law enforcement mandated by Security Council resolution 1704 (2006), while also substantially increasing efforts to support the training, institutional development and strengthening of the national police. There are currently approximately 1460 UNMIT police from 41 different countries, including four Formed Police Units from Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan and Portugal. The screening of the police officers of the National Police Force of Timor-Leste (PNTL), as provided for under the Supplemental Arrangement on Policing between UNMIT and the Government of Timor-Leste, signed on 1 December 2006, has been completed and UNMIT police and PNTL have been working side-by-side throughout the country. In resolution 1802 (2008), the Security Council requested UNMIT, working with partners, to intensify its efforts to assist with further training, mentoring, institutional development, and strengthening of the PNTL, with a view to enhancing its effectiveness.

The Timorese police service is one component of the larger security sector architecture. In the same resolution, the Council also requested UNMIT to intensify its efforts in support of the comprehensive review of the future role and needs of the security sector, in close coordination with the Government of Timor-Leste and relevant donors.

In order to simultaneously address the short-, medium- and long-term needs of Timor-Leste in an efficient manner, UNMIT has provided advice to State institutions, the UN Country Team and other development partners, and concentrates primarily on the immediate challenges in priority mandated areas. The UN Country Team focuses on medium- to long-term challenges in addition to addressing immediate humanitarian issues. The two are closely coordinated in an "integrated mission" approach.

In partnership with the Government, one of the immediate priorities is bringing a durable solution to the situation of

the approximately 100,000 remaining internally displaced persons (IDP) throughout the country (with 30,000 living in camps in Dili). Realization of voluntary return or relocation of the IDPs will require a holistic approach that depends on a number of factors, including, among others, a stable security environment, a strengthened legal framework for resolving land and property disputes, and economic regeneration and livelihood activities. UNMIT and the UN Country Team are working with the Government, development partners and NGOs to address the needs of the IDPs. Solving these and other pressing problems will allow the country to give its full attention to the core underlying socio-economic challenges, in particular widespread poverty and massive youth unemployment, which, if not addressed, will continue to threaten the political stability of Timor-Leste.

Background

UNMIT – a multidimensional, integrated UN operation – was established by Security Council resolution 1704 of 25 August 2006 in the wake of a major security, political, and humanitarian crisis which erupted in Timor-Leste in April-May 2006. UNMIT succeeded the UN Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL) which in turn was preceded by the UN Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET) from 2002-2005, the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) from 1999-2002, and the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) from June to November 1999.

UNMIT has a wide-ranging mandate to assist Timor-Leste, including by facilitating dialogue and reconciliation; the restoration and maintenance of public security; further training, institutional development and strengthening of the national police; the conduct of a comprehensive review of the future role and needs of the security sector; promoting a “compact” between Timor-Leste and the international community; further building the capacity of State and Government institutions such as the justice sector; monitoring, promoting and protecting human rights; and facilitating the provision of relief and recovery assistance. As set out in Security Council resolution 1704, UNMIT was also mandated to support Timor-Leste in all aspects of the 2007 presidential and parliamentary electoral process, “including through technical and logistical support, electoral policy advice and verification or other means.”

Despite the fact that the overall situation in Timor-Leste has improved since the establishment of UNMIT, the Mission continues to face many challenges in helping the Government of Timor-Leste and civil society to consolidate peace within the country and build the foundations for sustainable social and economic development. The security situation remains fragile. Persisting differences among political leaders and parties have prevented consensus approaches for resolving a number of pressing issues, and UNMIT continues to use its good offices to promote dialogue and national reconciliation.

The visit of the Security Council mission last November and the mid-December visit of the Secretary-General to Timor-Leste reflected the continuing strong support of the international community for the Timorese people, with both being the first such visits since the restoration of the country’s independence over five years ago. It is promising that, since these high-level visits, serious efforts in this direction have been undertaken under the leadership of President Ramos-Horta who brokered two meetings on 17 January and 7 February to bring together the parties in the governing AMP coalition and Fretilin (the opposition party with the most number of seats in Parliament). They had constructive discussions on the establishment of possible mechanisms for promoting more inclusive approaches for addressing the country’s pressing problems.

*UNMIT has an authorized strength of 34 military liaison officers; 1,748 police; 432 international civilian personnel; 756 national staff and 131 UN Volunteers. The General Assembly appropriated \$160.6 million for UNMIT for the 2007/2008 financial year. The Mission is headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Timor-Leste, Atul Khare. He is supported by the Deputy SRSG for Security Sector Support and Rule of Law (currently vacant) and the Deputy SRSG for Governance Support, Development and Humanitarian Coordination.

For further information on UNMIT and its activities, please see:
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmit/index.html>