

International Women's Day

An update on the commemoration of International Women's Day in Timor-Leste, both national, district level, as well as UN organized events, the President's message and the Pledge adopted by the Government of Timor-Leste.

Government Events

1. The statement from President Ramos Horta on the occasion of International Women's Day was delivered to the nation from his hospital bed in Darwin (see attached).
2. On Saturday 8 March, the Office of the Secretary of State for Promotion of Equality (SEPI) supported by UNMIT, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNIFEM and REDE FETO organized a High Level Gender Policy Dialogue on this year's theme of "Financing for Gender Equality-Investing in Women and Girls – Investing in Equality". The Dialogue was attended by about 300 persons including the Prime Minister, interim President Lasama, acting President of Parliament, Deputy President of Parliament, Council of Ministers, Members of Parliament, senior government policy makers, members of the diplomatic corps, multi-lateral agencies, myself, DSRSG, representatives of the UN Country Team, and civil society organizations.
3. The Prime Minister opened the dialogue recognizing the invaluable contribution the women of Timor-Leste have made towards independence, nation building and towards the economy and stability of the country. He gave his personal undertaking to support the Pledge that was to be adopted at the end of the dialogue.
4. The Prime Minister also reiterated the government's commitment to the Gender Commission to ensure that women's issues, and issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women, will remain in the forefront of policy making at all times. The Gender Commission was proposed during the Ramos-Horta government but has yet to take effect.
5. In my opening statement I emphasized the achievements of women and applauded their contribution to economic development, nation and state building. I also stated that women are critical agents of social change and poverty eradication and urged Timor-Leste to invest resources and provide sufficient funding for programmes that support women's empowerment as a priority for economic development and growth. I further emphasized that foreign direct investments and international trade can be an engine for driving development and can increase women's employment in the formal and informal sectors. I took the opportunity to underscore that at a time when we celebrate the achievements made we need also to reflect seriously on those areas of women's lives where discrimination, violence, poor political decisions, poor social and economic policies, politics of marginalization and social exclusion inhibit their potential and impedes their progress. Although women's access to education, health care and paid employment have all improved, and legislation that promises equal opportunities for women and respect for their human rights has been adopted in many countries including Timor-Leste, de facto enjoyment of those promises continues to be a major challenge for all of us.

6. The panel presentations at the national dialogue event included a lengthy statement by the acting President of the Parliament on the international legal standards and Conventions adopted by Parliament to protect the human rights of women, as well as laws adopted to promote the political participation of women. The Minister of Finance, a representative from the Ministry of Justice and one representative from civil society made presentations which were followed by a lively debate amongst participants.

7. At the end of the dialogue the participants discussed and adopted a national pledge, on the part of the Government and Parliamentarians, representing an important commitment by Timorese leadership and its stakeholders to work together towards greater gender equality. I am pleased to attach the preliminary draft of the pledge which is currently undergoing some minor revisions by SEPI based on feedback from the dialogue plenary session.

8. DSRSG Reske-Nielsen closed the dialogue event stressing the need to expedite the adoption of the amendments to the penal code and domestic violence law, to assist in ending domestic violence and all forms of gender based violence. The DSRSG also emphasized the importance of the land law, particularly as 70 percent of the rural population are engaged in farming, thus equal entitlement for rural women to land ownership and title is critical to women who are widows and heads of households for their livelihoods and stability.

9. DSRSG Reske-Nielsen also reiterated the importance of the Gender Commission as a critical mechanism to bring all the partners around the table to tackle gender issues and assured the government and participants of the full support of the United Nations in its operationalization.

10. Furthermore, DSRSG Reske-Nielsen used the opportunity of the national dialogue event to highlight the ongoing issue of how gender based violence is dealt with in the draft domestic violence law and the Penal Code. The fact that it is defined as a semi-public crime would give the discretion to the police to intervene in cases of domestic violence, which they would generally be reluctant to do. Whereas defining it as a public crime would ensure that the police are required to intervene in all cases. There is clearly a need to harmonize the draft domestic violence law and the Penal Code as they work in tandem to address domestic violence. These comments were appreciated by the forum.

11. On Thursday 6 March the Ministry of Agriculture and Education had separate panel and group discussions on this year's theme of "Investing in Women and Girls". The Ministry of Agriculture had group discussions on the theme "Economic Empowerment of Women through Agricultural Development" and formed focal point groups for training, capacity building, employment and recruitment within the Ministry of Agriculture.

12. The Office of Promotion for Equality organized a volleyball tournament between the women of the Government, women of Parliament, women NGOs, IDP women, and police women from PNTL. Games took place over a series of weekends culminating the final on 8 March. Women from the Government won first place, women IDPs second, and PNTL police women third.

IWD activity in Parliament

13. On 10 March the Timor-Leste Parliament sat in a special session to debate the global theme of “Financing for Gender Equality - Investing in Women and Girls; Investing in Equality”. The session began with a minute silence for the women who sacrificed their life for the independence of the Nation. The debate opened by the acting President of the Parliament Vincente Guterres acknowledging the contribution of women to independence, nation building and the economy of the State. He highlighted the various International Conventions that Timor-Leste had ratified including the CEDAW Convention that protects and promotes the rights of women. He also emphasized that the election laws promulgated by Parliament took affirmative action to promote the participation of women in the electoral process and in Parliament.

14. Fretilin, CNRT, PD, PUN, ADST, KOTA, PSD and PPT took the floor to lend their support to the issue of women’s equal rights and opportunities to access land, property and credit, and to be recognized as equal partners in the development of the nation.

15. The Chairperson of Committee E read out the Pledge adopted by the Government and Parliamentarians at the High Level Gender Policy Dialogue on 8 March (and attached).

16. Furthermore, Parliament had invited all suco chefes and women representatives from the 13 districts as observers to the special session. A film on the PERWL project of UNDP/UNIFEM was shown in Parliament after the debate.

17. Parliament also borrowed UNMIT's photo exhibition prepared especially for International Womens’ Day to be on display in the Parliament Hall during the session (see below).

International Women’s Day event in O brigado Barracks for UN Staff

18. On Friday 7 March several events were organized at O brigado Barracks to celebrate International Women’s Day with UN staff, both UNMIT and UN Country Team.

19. A dedicated Town Hall meeting was called with special guest speakers Ms Idelta Rodrigues, the Secretary of State for Promotion of Equality (SEPI) and Ms Fernanda Borges, Chairperson of Parliamentary Committee A and President of PUN, who made moving presentations on this years theme for International Women’s Day. The panel discussion was moderated by myself.

20. This was followed by a ceremony of awards given by myself to 13 female Timorese colleagues to highlight the important contribution made by female UN staff. All UN colleagues (UNMIT and UN Country Team) had been invited to nominate female colleagues who demonstrated outstanding leadership, professionalism, and dedication to the United Nations as well as to peace and stability for Timor-Leste. The recognition ceremony was very moving and highly appreciated by the women who were nominated and by staff themselves.

21. Furthermore, DSRSG Reske-Nielsen in his capacity as the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative launched a new UNDP regional publication entitled “Financing for Gender Equality - Global Evidence and the Asia-Pacific Setting”. The report suggests that decreasing gender inequalities has the potential of accelerating human

development and growth, and that the MDG goals will not be achieved without incorporating women's priorities, potential for leadership and full participation in the process of planning and development.

22. The UNMIIT Gender Affairs Unit distributed white ribbons to all male staff in support of the Men Against Violence global campaign to seek men's contribution to end violence against women. The UNMIT HIV/AIDS unit distributed T-shirts and bags to female staff with critical messages regarding women and girls and HIV/AIDS infection.

23. The joint UN Communication Officers working group (comprising communication and media officers from the UN Country Team and the UNMIT Public Information Office) organized a photo exhibition celebrating the contribution of women in Timor-Leste. A free film festival took place in Obrigado Barracks in the afternoon and evening of 7 March for all UN staff showcasing a number of important films from the region that highlight gender issues.

International Women's Day Events in the Districts

24. Numerous activities and events took place in the districts and sucos organized by REDE FETO and other NGOs, suco chefes and also UNMIT. REDE-FETO conducted activities in Los Palos, Baucau, Liquica, Ainaro and Dili including discussions on the role and contribution of women in their day-to-day lives and as community leaders. These community debates were followed by various activities including a community cleanliness campaign, and sports and cultural activities, that were appreciated by women as well as community members.

25. Regional UNMIT Public Information Offices organized activities in four districts of Baucau, Maliana, Oecussi and Suai. In Salele, Suai about 84 persons attended a public event and the film "Stop Violence against Women" was shown and discussed. In Bacau, the regional PIO participated in an open house organized by national NGO Belun focused on the national ending domestic violence campaign. In Maliana UNMIIT staff organised a photo exhibition, screening of UNPOL Vulnerable Persons Unit slide show and film against domestic violence, with participation by the District Administrator and the Deputy District Administrator, NGO and civil society representatives, as well as the UNMIT Human Rights Officer. In Oecusse the UNPOL film as screened and at each event UNMIT staff distributed the Human Rights Declaration, flags, posters and the Secretary-General's message in Tetum.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

"Today women all over the world celebrate International Women's Day. With deep respect I wish to congratulate all the women of Timor-Leste. On this day I ask all of the people of Timor-Leste, to stop domestic violence; violence against women and children. I hope for this not only in Timor-Leste but all over the world; not only for today but everyday. We have to remember that women are our partners and an important "light" for the family and society,

in order to create stability in our nation and stability in the world. Timor-Leste has shown its conviction to adhere to the Human Rights values in constructing a society with Justice, Liberty and Equality. These have to be the roots of our everyday lives. From my hospital bed I give my support to the women of Timor-Leste and to all the Timorese people, to adhere to the Human Rights Conventions, especially the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which has been ratified by our country. The incidents of 11th of February will not deter me or anybody in Timor to build a Timor based on respect for life and the dignity of the human being. We refuse the use of a death penalty, perpetual imprisonment and all other forms of violence perpetuated by state on its citizens. I have recently reconfirmed this commitment on Human Rights day last December. We should not forget the sacrifice of the women of Timor during our struggle for freedom, we should value and remember their tears and suffering. We have to build a Timor of equal rights for men and women - equality among citizens in the eyes of law. We should also remember the children as they are our future. We should continue to create an atmosphere of stability, so that people do not feel afraid, and have confidence in tomorrow. Mothers and women look after our children's 'non-violence' education, their health and prepare them for their future. On this International Women's day, I pledge for the people of Timor-Leste, men and women, in Dili and in the Districts, in the city, sucos and villages, in all circumstances, for a life with tranquility that is free from violence in their communities. Our Nation will not be constructed of violence but from peace. This is our hope for our young people and future generations."

Pledge

Investing in Women and Girls: Investing in Equality

We the Ministers of the Fourth Constitutional Government, Members of the National Parliament and representatives of Timor Leste civil society, who are gathered here today on 8 March 2008 at the Delta Nova Conference Hall, hereby state our commitment to invest in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

This commitment recognizes that:

- Collaboration between men and women in promoting gender equality will enable women and girls to fulfill their potential, and achieve sustainable national development;
- Investing in women and girls will have a major impact on productivity, efficiency and sustainability in economic development and will reduce poverty;
- The increased participation of women in the economic and financial decision making process will make a major contribution towards their empowerment;
- When women and girls gain access to quality education, productive resources and participation in decision making, then the quality of life of women, and the entire community will be improved, and the national economy will become more robust;
- Eradicating gender based violence will enable women and girls to participate in national development.

Therefore we make a commitment together with other stakeholders to increase investment in gender equality, to raise our colleagues' awareness in the creation of programs, policies and on gender equality, including:

- To develop a strategy for the national budget that is gender sensitive and providing oversight during its implementation.
- To develop strategies to eradicate violence faced by women in Timorese society.
- To develop mechanisms to promote equal access and control of property and land rights, and equal access to credit and capital.
- To ensure that gender mainstreaming is incorporated into the Second National Development Plan and will endeavor to further expand financial and human resources dedicated to gender equality within relevant institutions.
- Establish a dynamic partnership, including the distribution of resources and knowledge about gender equality, through SEPI, to increase knowledge and competency in this field across Timor Leste.

We seek to ensure that these efforts will contribute to fulfilling the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. We will also endeavor to work together, as partners, to promote transparency and accountability in our interventions.

[Note draft currently under revision by SEPI]