



**Speech by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
Timor-Leste, Dr. Atul Khare**

**Special Session of Parliament on Human Rights
10 December 2009**

Excellencies,

I am honoured to stand before this auspicious House again, to commemorate International Human Rights Day with you, on the occasion of the second Special Session of Parliament on Human Rights. This tradition, begun by this auspicious House last year, is now clearly an annual event as promised by its esteemed President Fernando La Sama de Araújo. I am heartened to be a part of it again this year.

10 December is globally commemorated to mark the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It is also a day to celebrate the past year's achievements in the realisation of rights, and to chart the work that still lies ahead.

This year, the global theme is to “embrace diversity” and “end discrimination.” To echo the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, “[t]he concept of non-discrimination lies at the heart of human rights.....[The wide array] of rights-based international treaties [as well as national and regional laws] are imbued throughout with the concept of non-discrimination.....[This is a testament] of humankind's ability and aspiration to create a world of equal opportunity and equal treatment under the law. And many millions of people have benefitted as a result,” including all Timorese. Ms.

Pillay further stated that “[p]eople of all sorts have something to offer. When we embrace diversity, we bring extra richness and depth to our societies. Yet, discrimination is still rampant.” This particularly rings true when looking at things from a gender equality perspective.

I am delighted that to mark International Human Rights Day, this year, this august House decided to dedicate its debate and interventions to the rights of women and the girl-child in Timor-Leste. If my memory, in my old age, serves me correctly, today would be the fourth time that Parliament is discussing issues around the rights of women and the girl-child of Timor-Leste. I would like to commend this House for its continued commitment to address this issue.

For Timor-Leste to maintain its development momentum and to ensure non-discrimination against half of its population, its continued embrace of gender equality and the empowerment and protection of women and the girl-child is integral. In this regard, important strides have been made by Timor-Leste during my service in your beautiful country.

The adoption of the political commitment, *Dili Kompromiso*, on 8 March last year, illustrates the determination of the Government, Parliament and civil society to ensure that women play an equal role, with men, in the development of the nation.

The Government, with civil society, is advocating women’s health rights, ensuring better care for women in pregnancy and child-birth, the provision of emergency services in cases of complications, as well as the availability of high quality reproductive health services inclusive of awareness-raising on sexual and reproductive health issues using culturally sensitive approaches.

The Government presented its first report, in June this year, to the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The establishment, this year, of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, including the appointment of a Commissioner, is to be commended. This was a 2008 commitment by the Government, as per its 2008 report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Last month, we all celebrated the 20th anniversary of this most widely ratified international Convention – the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is my belief that the newly appointed Commissioner will advocate, with you and other stakeholders, for appropriate programmes and policies, such as the Children’s Code and the Juvenile Justice Law, that will benefit and enhance the lives of all Timorese children and society overall.

The establishment of a Youth Parliament, with an equal representation of young women and men, as per the resolution of the Council of Ministers, is yet another illustration of commitment to listen to the voices of children and promote their participation in civic life. I remember that His Excellency President José Ramos-Horta had mentioned this idea at the UN General Assembly in 2007. I also remember that His Excellency, the President of the Parliament of Timor-Leste Senhor Fernando La Sama de Araújo, had also mentioned in the recent past the importance of having a Youth Parliament. The establishment of a Youth Parliament can only augur well for Timor-Leste, as it will encourage the participation of young people, nurturing their leadership capacities. In turn, the Youth Parliament can be a vehicle for young people to contribute to the development of a Timor-Leste that is stable and peaceful.

On this International Human Rights Day, these are but a few of my reflections of the progress made by Timor-Leste – by the political parties and civil society, working together – to realise the rights of women and the girl-child in Timor-Leste. But, as always, and as in every country, more work needs to, and can, be done.

Allow me to mention a few challenges. Last week, Timor-Leste hosted the trilateral discussion on the protection of women and girls in situations of armed conflict and in post-conflict settings, as per the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. I am especially pleased to note Timor-Leste's participation in these discussions, as this particular UN Security Council Resolution focuses on three areas that are pertinent to Timor-Leste. They are the need for the participation of women in all decision-making processes, the prevention and protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, and the promotion and protection of the rights of women. These are very broad areas and Timor-Leste is already moving in a positive direction on some of them. The UN system has sought to support Timorese initiatives in this regard. This work must continue under the good leadership of the Office of the State Secretary for the Promotion of Equality, with the support of Parliament, in partnership with relevant national stakeholders.

This House has shown its concern for ending violence against women and children, in all forms, not only through lending its support to the public campaigns to stop violence against women, but also through its special session on 8 March of this year. This Parliamentary support should also continue, as it is largely through Parliamentary processes that any Government of the day is held to account, to its people, on human rights obligations enshrined in its Constitution. On this international human rights day I also wish to thank the President for his City of Peace

initiative, Dili as a city of peace will of course begin within homes of peace, homes in which violence against women and children has no place.

This august House has also supported the adoption of the new Penal Code, which makes domestic violence a public crime and clearly not a family matter. In the same vein, I hope that this House will lend its support and weight to the adoption of the proposed Law Against Domestic Violence that is to be tabled before it in the coming months. The UN system in Timor-Leste has supported the hard work of the Office of the State Secretary for the Promotion of Equality and civil society to move this draft law through its natural processes. The onus is soon to be on this good House to see it through to its enactment.

As representatives of the people of Timor-Leste, members of this House have shown concern for ending impunity and ensuring justice for victims of recent, and past, atrocities and human rights violations, including female victims who have been largely forgotten in the larger scheme of things. The legal framework of Timor-Leste gives enormous importance to human rights.

Timor-Leste can take advantage of the legal building-blocks already in place and contribute to making Timor-Leste a regional and world leader in human rights and not just another country that often ignores its human rights obligations and shies away from standing its ground on principles of accountability and justice on behalf of its people both past and future, even amongst regional and global friends. Having been born out of suffering and a long struggle for freedom and independence, who better to serve as an example to the world of what can be, than Timor-Leste?

When the sun sets over the Western horizon of Timor-Leste tomorrow evening, I shall no longer be in your beautiful country. But as I look around me today, in this august House, I am convinced of the genuine concern and desire of this Parliament, and indeed the Government of the day, the opposition and the civil society, to implement and realise, without discrimination, the spirit and intent of all the rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of Timor-Leste and in the international human rights treaties ratified by Timor-Leste.

As I prepare to depart your beautiful shores, I leave in the knowledge that the Parliament and indeed, all the institutions of sovereignty, of Timor-Leste will strive to do what is right, noble and dignified for its women and children and for all its people.

Wherever I may be in the future my hand will remain out-stretched always in friendship with Timor-Leste and its people.

May God Bless Timor-Leste.