

East Timor and the Region

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About the Speaker

Mr José Ramos-Horta is the Cabinet Member for Foreign Affairs, East Timor Transitional Authority, and is the Vice-President of the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT). In 1996, Mr Ramos-Horta shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Bishop Carlos Belo for his efforts to resolve the East Timor situation. Among his other awards are the Professor Thorolf Rafto Human Rights Prize (1993) and the Gleitzman Foundation Award (1995). Mr Ramos-Horta has also received an Honorary Doctor of Laws from three separate institutions: the Pontificia Universidade Catolica of Campinas in Brazil (1996), Antioch University (1997), and the University of New South Wales (1998).

Mr Ramos-Horta had his early education in East Timor. In 1984 he graduated with an MA in Peace Studies from Antioch University in Ohio. He has also been a Senior Associate Member of St Anthony's College, Oxford.

EAST TIMOR AND THE REGION

Given that the topic of this paper is “East Timor and the Region” I will outline East Timor’s relations with the region and proposals for greater interaction with regional organization — notably ASEAN. Before discussing relations with ASEAN, I will make some observations on the role of the United States and East Timor’s hopes for access to the affluent markets of North America and Europe. The thrust of this paper is that while East Timor stands at the crossroads between Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, gaining membership of ASEAN will be the primary foreign policy goal of the future government in East Timor. It is also an opportune time to express thanks for the solidarity shown by countries in the region to East Timor after the violence surrounding the 1999 referendum.

In the aftermath of the announcement of the election results in the United States, I would like to start by paying tribute to the outgoing US President, William Jefferson Clinton. Not only is he a great President and a great human being, but also the most charming and engaging person I have met in a long time. In September 2000 I was fortunate to have met him on three occasions between New York and Washington. As he leaves office, I must express our most sincere gratitude to his leadership in eight years as the President of the United States. It is unfortunate that the US political system does not allow him to stay in office as long as Soeharto did in Indonesia.

We were worried about the uncertainty of a new administration in the US. However, I was so pleased and touched by the announcement, by President-elect George W. Bush, of the appointment of the new Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and the new National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. There cannot be more sensitive, reliable people at the helm of US foreign policy. Their particular background, I

believe, will lead to sensitive engagement by the US, at least in regard to East Timor, and probably in regard to the rest of the world. For those who fear an isolationist policy by the US or a retreat from active engagement, this is clearly not the case. There will be constructive and positive engagement because of two exceptional individuals, Colin Powell and Condoleeza Rice, who have a similar background to many of us in East Timor, through the experiences of poverty and discrimination. Colin Powell, the son of Jamaican migrants, and Condoleeza Rice, who grew up in the period of the struggle for civil rights in Alabama. It is remarkable that the President-elect, whom everybody expected to make fewer minority appointments to Cabinet, has made two remarkable appointments. So as we say a warm farewell to Clinton, these appointments are very pleasing.

Although the US is not part of our region, it is effectively a neighbour to everybody. It is an overwhelming hegemonic power that cannot be ignored. That power can be put to use for the good of humanity, but there were times when the US caused devastation to many countries. Vietnam, Chile, and South Africa in the 1980s, are a few examples. Nonetheless, the US is capable of tremendous good. In 1999, if it was not for President Clinton's leadership, the firmness with which he handled the issue of East Timor, and his ability to persuade the Indonesian side to acknowledge it was time to leave, then maybe we in East Timor would not be here today.

But credit goes to the region as well. Contrary to the general perception that Interfet (International Force East Timor), the UN backed intervention in East Timor, was a western-led exercise, many Asian countries, including ASEAN countries, contributed decisively in a discrete but effective manner in persuading Indonesia to accept an international intervention in East Timor. Countries such as China, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and Korea, worked closely with the US and Australia in persuading Indonesia that it was time to leave and respect the ballot results of 30 August 1999.

President Kim Dae-jung of Korea, whom I just saw in December in Oslo, played a leading role in the resolution to the crisis. I am proud to say that I nominated him in January 2000 for the Nobel Peace Prize. I was invited by Kim Dae-jung to join him in Oslo for the Nobel Peace Prize acceptance ceremony. He was the one who very effectively, behind the scenes, talked with Jiang Zemin of China, and the

then Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan about the East Timor situation. The three together talked with the then president B J Habibie of Indonesia, and made him understand that major Asian countries could not continue to support Indonesia if they would not respect the results of the ballot.

ASEAN countries have shown tremendous courage. In the case of Thailand, it was not a very popular decision for the Thai government to send in a battalion strength contribution to the Interfet mission in East Timor. It was a courageous political risk taken by both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of Thailand. The Philippines also made a military contribution, although it was not a political risk, because there was tremendous popular support in the Philippines. Singapore did not contribute combat troops but was equally helpful with personnel involved in medicine, logistics and communications.

So, contrary to the popular media perception that it was solely an Australian operation, Interfet was also a regional operation. It was Australian-led in the sense that the bulk of the troops were Australian and the force was led by an outstanding Australian General, Peter Cosgrove. However it was truly a regional effort. And the US provided the political leadership that was necessary for that operation to take place.

Hence 24 years after Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, East Timor is finally free, and on the road towards full independence. It is what I would call "the most impossible dream". Who would have thought that a small nation of 800,000 with an area of only 19,000 square kilometres, would ever be free from its giant neighbour, the Republic of Indonesia? The notion that such a small country could one day be free after the Indonesian Occupation was actually an impossible dream, and yet it is a reality. The people of East Timor, after 500 years of occupation — first by Portuguese colonial rule, five years of Japanese Occupation in World War II, and 24 years of Indonesian Occupation — can now be the masters of their own country.

The costs of the past 24 years of Indonesia's rule are enormous. Dili, and many other towns in East Timor, remind one of Hiroshima or Dresden after World War II. Town after town, house after house, was burnt down or blown up by retreating Indonesian troops and their militia supporters. So, the cost has been substantial for the people of East Timor. One year after the UN intervened in East

Timor, questions are being asked about whether the UN is doing a good job. We had a meeting in Brussels with the donor countries that support East Timor. Many countries were present, from Japan to China to Australia, the US, the UK, the European Union, Russia and so on. At the meeting I asked how long it took Japan to recover from World War II in order to drive home the message that even Japan, which had a prior industrial base, took many years to rebuild.

East Timor was as sorrowfully devastated as parts of Japan, Dresden, and other parts of Europe after World War II. And yet in less than one year, some of the most intelligent journalists in the region have begun to write highly critical reports about the performance of the UN and the East Timorese leadership.

But what is the picture today? The most important gain from the past 12 months is peace and security. It is no exaggeration that in East Timor the people have not known security or tranquility for 24 years. They could not sleep in peace because they knew that in the middle of the night, an army truck or a police car could come in and take their children away. For the people who went through the traumatic experience of the 1999 referendum, and the aftermath, the greatest gift is their safety.

Ironically, East Timor today, compared with our immediate region, is an oasis of tranquility. Again ironically, the Indonesian province of West Timor, part of the East Nusa Tenggara Timor, is dependent on East Timor for its economic survival. West Timor is making millions of dollars out of trade with East Timor. If East Timor were suddenly to close the border in order to prevent the malicious incursions of militia gangs from entering East Timor, West Timor would be choked economically. If one goes to the Dili market, it is full of goods from Indonesia and most of them came via West Timor. But can East Timor survive without trading with West Timor? Yes. More reliable sources could be found in Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and China, amongst others.

The merchants and traders have no ideology and know no barriers. We can trade with West Timor but West Timor itself produces nothing. It is a transit point for goods coming from Sumatra and elsewhere. So why is it that East Timor does not buy goods directly from Singapore? Why do we not buy from Thailand or even directly from Sumatra? West Timor benefits from trade with East Timor and a relatively open border, and yet continues to allow the militia to operate there. In spite

of that, we resist the temptation to close off the border because we continue to pursue the normalization of relations with Indonesia.

As I have discussed with the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Alwi Shihab, in a meeting in New York recently, my vision is that one day the borders between East Timor and West Timor will disappear in order to allow the complete freedom of movement. It is also desirable that in the long term that there are no weapons on either side of the island. We hope that the island will come to be known as an island of peace and cooperation. West Timor remains part of East Nusa Tenggara Timor, and an integral part of Indonesia, while East Timor is on its way to being independent, yet it is our vision that the two sides of the island will cooperate in trade, economic, health, education, and controlling the mutual problems of transborder crime, poverty, malaria and tuberculosis.

As mentioned by the author to Alwi Shihab, it may be an illusion or a dream, but it is one that can be realized because there is no greater dream than that of an independent East Timor. Who would have thought it possible, ten years ago, that East Timor would be on its way to full independence? So why would it be such an illusion, to think of a comprehensive relationship between East Timor and West Timor as I have outlined it? The important thing is that we have the courage, in spite of difficulties, to start conceptualizing and working towards improved relations.

Within a month after Indonesian troops left East Timor, in October 1999 CNRT President Xanana Gusmao and myself went to Jakarta. I do not know of any conflicts in recent history where the parties to the conflict exchanged high level visits so soon. Iran and Iraq have not exchanged visits. Neither have Kuwait and Iraq. It took the French and Algerians, after the Algerians opted for independence, at least 20 years before they exchanged high level visits. Yet Gusmao and I went to Jakarta, and have subsequently met with Gus Dur,¹ General Wiranto, the new armed forces chief Admiral Widodo, and many other Indonesian leaders. Many of the military leaders we recognized by their nametags as architects of the occupation and the destruction of East Timor. But we viewed it as important to try to put the past behind us where it belongs. In spite of our experiences with some of those leaders, it is more important to build a new future.

Normalization with Indonesia has been both easy and difficult. At one level it is not easy because of the instability in Indonesia itself. The enormous difficulties the President of Indonesia faces in rebuilding institutions, in consolidating democracy, instituting reforms in the armed forces, and in trying to recover a shattered economy. Yet it is also easier because we are also dealing with a new Indonesian leader, Gus Dur. He is an exceptional leader and there are many other good people around him. It was also easier because never once in our 24 year struggle for independence was religion involved in order to make our views prevail. We never went to the US Congress, to the US Clergy, to the Catholics in Australia and Europe, appealing to them to help us on the grounds that we were a small Catholic country being persecuted by the largest Muslim country in the world. Such a characterization would be cheap demagoguery. Furthermore, throughout the 24 years under Indonesian rule we were always extremely careful to stress that we were not struggling against the *people* of Indonesia. The people of Indonesia and the people of East Timor were victims of the same regime. Actually, the regime of General Soeharto never discriminated when it comes to human rights abuses. Whether one was a Muslim, Catholic, or Protestant, Soeharto could not care less. All religious and cultural groups in Indonesia were subject to repression. So the struggle in East Timor was never one of Muslims versus Catholics, or one ethnic group against another. It was a military occupation, opposed by a struggle for self-determination and decolonization. This has made it easier to explain to the people in East Timor why we must normalize relations with Indonesia. When Gus Dur visited East Timor at our invitation in February 2000, he was warmly received. Would this happen in Kosovo? No. Even with 50,000 NATO troops there, Serbians in Kosovo are still not safe.

In the next twelve months we will move towards independence. November or December 2001 are the two months we have tentatively slated for full independence. I cannot advance any specific date because this date is still subjected to consultation with everyone in East Timor, and also dependent on the ground conditions. If we have completed some of the basic fundamental tasks, such as institution building capacity and democratization, then maybe the target of November and December would be met. If not we can postpone it. We have waited 500 years, why not one or two more years, if that should prove necessary?

According to the current calendar, elections for president could take place in October 2001. A Constitution could be adopted by August. Elections for a Constituent Assembly will most probably occur in June. Between now and June, East Timorese officials will be working hard with the UN in carrying out public education, civic education, voter registration, and consolidating of some of institutions like the courts, the judicial system, our customs, airport, public administration, police force, and the training of our national defence force. We are starting from “ground zero” and what has been achieved so far in the past twelve months has been remarkable.

I am not a UN civil servant, and I have been critical of the UN performance in East Timor and many other places. But in fairness, it is impossible to do more in this short period of time in view of what the UN found on the ground when Interfet arrived. They found a country totally destroyed. Whatever was not looted, was burnt. Chairs, tables, desks, bed frames, refrigerators, air-conditioners, cars, motorbikes and many other things were taken away into Indonesian naval and merchant ships anchored off Dili harbour, or were carried away on trucks to West Timor. When the UN forces arrived in Dili there was not one single computer or typewriter around. There were no tables either. Almost 300,000 people out of a population of 800,000 were forced, many at gunpoint, into West Timor and other Indonesian islands. A hundred thousand are still in camps in West Timor. In the final analysis the UN has done a remarkable job. It could have done better maybe in some areas if governments had responded in providing the UN with some more qualified people because, often, it is the UN that takes the blame for the failure of governments that are members of the UN. When the UN decides to establish a mission, be it in East Timor, Sierra Leone, or Rwanda, it does not have personnel on standby in New York ready to act. The UN must make invitations to national governments. Governments then decide to send their personnel. We can identify some of the less dedicated, less competent people on the ground, as civil servants and officials from certain lukewarm member governments. The net result is that everybody blames the UN for the failure of national governments.

Furthermore the UN is over-stretched and governments are not paying their dues to the UN. I do not wish to mention names, but it is well known that one of the richest nations in the world is not paying. Hopefully they will pay soon.

We know that for the next 12 months, there is a renewed determination of donor countries to see that the UN succeeds in East Timor, not only for the good of the people of East Timor but also for the credibility of the UN. The success of the UN in East Timor certainly means happiness and prosperity for the people of East Timor. But failure would be also a disaster for the UN, both for the countries of the region and for the countries involved. The whole moral structure and architecture of the UN would be questioned. So I hope that countries in the region, in particular, remain engaged with the UN in making sure that the mission is a success.

As we prepare for independence, we are also engaging our neighbours in dialogue. This involves Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, Myanmar and the other countries of Southeast Asia. We are expressing to them our interest in joining ASEAN as soon as possible. ASEAN is important for the future of East Timor, not so much as an economic umbrella because we know that there are economic difficulties within the ASEAN countries, but as a means to attain security. So we would not be competing for assistance with members of ASEAN that need ASEAN's support. We would continue to develop and strengthen our privileged relationships with countries of the European Union, Japan, the US and Australia, where the bulk of East Timor's assistance will come from.

ASEAN could provide a "security umbrella" for East Timor. East Timor's external security and integrity in the future cannot rely only on having a credible army. We should not and cannot afford to spend too much money on an army. If small and far away places, like Mongolia or New Zealand, decided to invade us, we could not repel even them. So having a more or less credible military capacity is not terribly relevant for our external security. Membership in ASEAN and other regional organizations, and an active foreign policy in order to create a web of interests with countries of the region, will provide us with the best security guarantee. That is why we believe that joining ASEAN is a strategic priority. But in the meantime the reality is that there are two strategic pillars in our foreign relations — Australia and New Zealand.

Indonesians today are upset and hurt by Australia's role in East Timor. It is up to them to judge, but as I have said on Indonesian television a few weeks ago, it is important to try to understand that Australia also has a very tragic history. By the

thousands, their ancestors were handcuffed and kidnapped from Britain and Ireland, taken to Australia and dumped there. Literally with their bare hands they built that fabulous country. Then the British empire used Australians for every war it decided to fight including both world wars (including the tragedy of Gallipoli). Whenever they fought, they did so valiantly. Those same Australian troops were sent by their government to fight in East Timor.

For many years, in spite of government policies, public opinion in Australia was always sympathetic towards East Timor. They have shouldered their greatest burden in their protection of East Timor, together with New Zealand, and I say without any hesitation that we want to continue to develop the best possible relationship with them. I personally have advised our negotiators, when they were dealing with Australia on the Timor Gap, that when it comes to the oil and gas in the Timor Sea that our relationship with Australia is far more important than the mineral wealth. We will be dealing with Australia over the Timor Gap issue as friends and neighbours. Australia has been generous to East Timor. In turn we also know how to be fair and generous when it comes to revenue sharing on the Timor Sea.

With regard to the European Union, and Portugal in particular, some people questioned why we are so close to these countries. We have the capacity and the ability to normalize relations with Indonesia. We have the capacity and the ability to understand Australia, in spite of the previous 24 years. If we have the capacity and the ability to normalize relations with the US, with it becoming one of our closest friends today, in spite of past betrayal by former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, and former US President, Gerald Ford, in 1975, should anyone be surprised that we have this affectionate relationship with Portugal even after the colonial experience? Portugal raised the issue whenever possible in the European Union and often challenged its own partners in Europe. There is one notion that is very dear, and important to anyone, and that is loyalty to your friends.

Pragmatically the European Union is also very important, in this unipolar world, to which, maybe, the European Union can provide a balance in the future. So we will continue to develop our relationship with the European Union. We are right now working with Portugal and other friends such as Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Spain. We are trying to have the European Union accept East Timor as a signatory to

the Lomé Convention, which regulates trade and assistance relations to developing countries from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

We are already working in the US Congress to have a special bill adopted into law to allow East Timor free access to the US market. I raised this idea with both Senator John McCain in May, and Senator Ted Kennedy in September, and with many others in Washington. In the House of Representatives, a draft Bill was introduced and passed unanimously in the Foreign Relations Committee — which clears the first stage. I am convinced that by the end of 2001 we will have a special bill in the US Congress that would allow goods — agricultural and industrial — produced in East Timor to be exported to the US with no restrictions.

These measures, therefore, would potentially give us guaranteed access to the two largest markets in the world, the European Union and the US. That would be our main incentive for foreign investors to come to East Timor, besides security, tranquility, flexible investment laws and flexible taxation laws. We have learnt from Singapore and other countries in a similar situation that, besides security and stability, to develop our country we need to open up its economy.

Finally, I wish to once again express our most sincere gratitude to the countries of the region. Thanks go to Singapore, for its enormous contribution in 1999 and in the course of the last twelve months. Appreciation also goes to other ASEAN countries, particularly Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. It is important to reiterate that an independent East Timor will be an asset to ASEAN, and not a nuisance or a burden. In a very humble and modest way, we will try to contribute to the betterment of relations between this region and Australia and New Zealand, and between this region and Europe and the US. East Timor, after all, is a bit of Europe; a piece of the Mediterranean in Southeast Asia. The influence of Catholicism and Latin culture remain strong. But East Timor is also Asian, and we have had thousands of people in diaspora throughout the region. Thousands are studying in Asia, in Indonesia in particular, but also in Australia. Now many are also going to Europe. If we are able to preserve peace and security — which we know is the most important, because without that everything else is academic — we will try to be of some value to the region.

DISCUSSION

Question:

John O’Callaghan (Reuters): As you stated earlier East Timor is starting from “ground zero”. What do you see as the pillars of your economy and how will they be developed to take advantage of the relationships that you are trying to develop with the rest of Asia?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

Like most developing countries, we consider our agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries sector as our absolute priority in order to be self sufficient in food. The country is very fertile and we have vast areas that are unused. We have enough rainfall, particularly in the south coast. Right now, we already have about one hundred fishing vessels fishing illegally in our economic zone and we do not have the means to patrol the waters. Portugal is supplying us with two patrol vessels. The UN does not have any means to patrol our waters as the present time. But we have a very rich south coast for fisheries. In the medium term, we will get significant revenues from oil and gas once we conclude negotiations with Australia for our new revenue sharing arrangement in the Timor Gap but of course the full development of oil and gas will take a few years. There is also on-shore oil and gas. A private consortium has been set up in Australia that is going to look on-shore for gas and oil. We also have a vast amount of marble on the island — green and blue marble — which is totally untapped. Tourism is another potential, although we will not compete with any country in the region but we can offer alternatives. So these are some of the potentials for the economic development of East Timor. Of course, for the next two or three years, we will have to rely on generous assistance from the rest of the world. It is not realistic for us to meet our own budgetary needs and the reconstruction needs for the next several years.

Question:

Tim Johnson (Kyodo News): What is your reaction to the Indonesian proposal for the West Pacific Forum and have you been approached or consulted on this? If so, by which countries?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

Certainly it is a proposal that Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea are already seriously considering. We are grateful that President Gus Dur thought to include us in this particular grouping. Without having seen any real concrete proposals on that initiative, my immediate reaction is, “Why not?” This could be a positive step as the combined economic strength of Australia and New Zealand is considerable. But, we are a small player in these sorts of developments. We will be guided by the other four — Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand. If they are all eager to follow through with President Gus Dur’s suggestion, obviously we will join as long as it is not mutually exclusive to membership of ASEAN. Membership of ASEAN is irreplaceable as a foreign policy goal of East Timor and we have been told by ASEAN countries that membership in the South Pacific Forum would exclude East Timor from membership in ASEAN. If this is the case then we will immediately discard the idea of membership in the South Pacific Forum. Ideally, we would like to be part of both, and we argue that we are on the crossroads between Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. However ASEAN officials have not been persuaded by this argument. The reality is that ASEAN does not agree with dual membership. But we will see how this all develops.

Question:

Lim Ho Hup (private consultant): From what you know, how do you see Indonesia’s reaction towards East Timor’s bid for membership in ASEAN? How will they react to it?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

President Gus Dur has been one of the most enthusiastic supporters for East Timor's membership in ASEAN, as has Indonesia's former Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas. In Indonesia, we are very pleased to say, we have very strong support. Gus Dur has made the point that he wants to see East Timor in ASEAN, preferably as soon as possible, to prevent any external interference or influence in East Timor. The advantage for ASEAN with East Timor's membership is that it would have an added voice to its agenda. Furthermore, the future government in East Timor will know that it will have to tune its diplomatic discourse and its agenda with the rest of ASEAN vis-à-vis the international community. Is it in ASEAN's interests to have East Timor outside of it with divergent views and policies? Clearly it is not, and that is Gus Dur's line of reasoning.

Question:

Jamus Lim (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies): You have painted a very optimistic picture of the scenario that might happen over the next few years. I am a bit curious to know what kind of contingency plans you might have in mind if what you said does not pan out the way that you are expecting. For example, there is speculation that the oil in the Timor Gap may not be economically viable to tap. If that were the case East Timor might have to depend on revenue aid. There are many small nations in the world that do not manage to break into world markets, and they require ongoing revenue aid. Therefore what kind of contingency plans do you have?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

Well, obviously, you have a point. But my assumptions are based on discussions with Phillips Petroleum, Shell, British Petroleum, and many mining companies. There are also specialists who have visited us, including some advisers from Norway. I recently escorted an academic geologist from Britain on his visit to East Timor. He has been working in the region, including Indonesia, for the past twenty years and he says there is much more oil on-shore (leaving aside offshore oil) than the industry conventionally accepts. We have already had two expressions of interest from oil companies to work either on-shore or offshore. Let us assume for a moment that oil

and gas revenues are much less than the most optimistic prediction. I tend to agree with many who criticise an over-reliance on oil for development. Many countries have had tragic experiences. We are working on other resources. We are positioned not far from Australia which is the largest economy in the region. Also, we are trying to gain better access to the US, and the European Union, and that would allow us to encourage manufacturing industries such as electronics, to East Timor. We are lobbying the US for an arrangement whereby products would have no restrictions as long as it originated from East Timor. There will be some internal restrictions but they will be minimal. We would be able to attract investors because of East Timor's access to two giant markets — the EU and the US. Beyond that we will also begin working on Australia, New Zealand and Japan to provide us with access. So East Timor could become a useful manufacturing base. I have noticed when I have talked with different congressional leaders in Washington that they are supportive of our situation. First out of sympathy, and secondly because we could export everything to the US and it would not really make a difference to that giant domestic economy. We do not anticipate any problems with either protectionists or labour activists in the US, as the US has had in its relations with China and other bigger Asian economies. In the case of East Timor, how many factories can you set up in East Timor, and how much can we export to the US? It would not damage the US domestic economy. Sympathy for our cause from both parties in the US means that this arrangement is moving quickly. I began talks about it informally in May. In September I followed-up with some phone calls before I went into Washington. By the time I got up there, there was already a bill in place, passed *unanimously* in the Foreign Relations Committee. We anticipate this going through both houses of Congress during 2001. Normally it takes a minimum of three years but in this case it will be just one year. Other similar bills, the Africa Bill and Pacific Bill, took ten years to be adopted. So, we have a lot of sympathy in Congress and that is an effective card that we can play.

Question:

Jack Smith (South China Morning Post): What reaction did you have from the Singapore Government during your trip this time to East Timor's potential membership of ASEAN? Certainly when ASEAN leaders met recently, it is

understood that Singaporean officials were not overly keen on extending ASEAN eastwards to East Timor.

Mr Ramos-Horta:

That report is unfounded. The only concern, by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, is that if East Timor were to join ASEAN in 2001, members of the United Nations or the European Union, could say, "Okay, now you are in ASEAN, you are well taken care of." So their advice is very pragmatic. We take the advice from the Senior Minister and the Prime Minister of Singapore very seriously. They are speaking from a position of authority and knowledge, based on what they have achieved for their country. We will think about that issue seriously, including if it is necessary to prolong the presence of the UN in East Timor. So that is the nature of our discussion and I completely agree with the two Singaporean leaders. I do not see any problem there as they are, in principle, very receptive to East Timor joining ASEAN. The question for them is only the timing.

Question:

Jochen Graebert (German Radio, Singapore): Mr Ramos-Horta, given the good relationship with Indonesia, do you still insist on the UN tribunal for the culprits of the massacres in 1999?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

Today, when I went to see the Prime Minister of Singapore, and signed the guest book, I noticed that the immediate guest before me was Marzuki Darusman, the Attorney-General of Indonesia. I made the point to the Prime Minister that he is a friend of mine. I was very encouraged and pleased when President Gus Dur appointed Marzuki Darusman as the Attorney-General. You cannot find a man in Indonesia with more integrity and courage than Marzuki Darusman, and he deserves the fullest support of the international community. He reminds one of those great Italian or Colombian attorneys who prosecute the Mafia or the drug cartel people. He is all the more exceptional in the sense that if you know his background, you would not expect him to be so strong on these issues. He was a member of the former ruling

party, Golkar, but was actually fired by Soeharto many years ago. So because of his efforts our position is that as long as Indonesia is prepared to bring to justice those responsible for the violence in East Timor, then they should be given every chance to do so. Indonesia is also a country in transition towards democracy with enormous difficulties. We do not want to make life even more difficult for President Gus Dur. They are trying to do their best in extremely difficult circumstances, and so we are prepared to wait for as long as it takes. We will see what is going to happen in the next two to three months. As both Mary Robinson, head of the UN Human Rights Commission, and Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, have stated, if Indonesia fails to deliver justice, the Security Council will have no choice but to set up a war crimes tribunal for East Timor. Kofi Annan made this point to Gus Dur in September 2000 in New York. Again, the nuance is very important. We are not talking about a war crimes tribunal for Indonesia. It will be a war crimes tribunal for East Timor. Contrary to speculation that certain countries in the Security Council will veto it, this is not the case. The most China and Russia will do is to abstain. If it is a war crimes tribunal for Indonesia then they will veto it. But it will be a war crimes tribunal for East Timor, which obviously will extend to elements of Indonesia. It will not extend to the Republic of Indonesia and to its serving leaders. The difference between Indonesia and ex-Yugoslavia, is that in ex-Yugoslavia, the UN was dealing with serving leaders. In Indonesia, there is a new democratic government which also intends to bring those responsible to justice. So a war crimes tribunal will only cover East Timor, with implications for certain elements of the Indonesian armed forces, some of whom are out of active duty.

Question:

Augustine Anthuvan (Radio Singapore International): Dr Ramos-Horta, what are your thoughts on ASEAN's long standing principle of non-interference? There have been calls for this long-standing principle to change with the times. Looking at the experience in your country, especially when the international troops arrived, there were countries which were reluctant to discuss this within the ASEAN Regional Forum. But here you have been rather candid and frank in your comments about your relations with Indonesia. If I may just very quickly illustrate this, you have, in the

Dili District Court, submitted a warrant for the arrest for a former deputy commander on a murder charge. So how would you foresee this longstanding principle of non-interference changing with the times when there are so many obstacles on the way to seeking truth and justice within East Timor?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

To put it simply, ASEAN is evolving. The region has changed dramatically in the last decade. By the time East Timor joins, hopefully ASEAN would have evolved to having discussions on issues of human rights and other transborder issues. It is not only ASEAN countries that know when, how and where to raise particular issues. It is tempting to think of this as Asian sensitivity but it is difficult to talk too loudly to the US on some of its domestic problems without a terse reaction. Equally do not talk too openly to France over the treatment of North African gas workers in France. So when we talk about sensitivity, there is a global phenomenon but somehow it is often portrayed that ASEAN or Asian countries have a particular sensitivity. We understand there are ways and settings where issues can be raised. We will have to wait and see how ASEAN develops on these issues.

Question:

Jasmine Tan (Channel News Asia): You talked about an ASEAN “security umbrella”. Can you elaborate a little more about what kind of role it might play. First, what actually are you hoping to see, and from which specific countries? Secondly, have you spoken to any of the other ASEAN leaders about joining ASEAN and what has been the response?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

The ASEAN “security umbrella” I spoke of means that theoretically our potential membership in ASEAN provides us with a sort of security assurance and that is more important than attempting to develop a credible defence force. Membership in ASEAN, and other regional and international organizations, should be the central pillar of our external security rather than the development of a defence force as such. But whatever defence force we will develop will be done in conjunction with

Portugal, Australia, the US, the UK and other countries. We have also invited ASEAN countries to participate in the consortium of countries that are setting up our military force. We had representatives from Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand in our discussion in East Timor in November 2000. The first formal talk on the defence force for East Timor was attended by representatives from several ASEAN countries. It was our own suggestion to the UN to get ASEAN countries involved in our defence forces. In the training of our civil police, we also have the assistance of several ASEAN countries. Singapore has 50 police officers in its team, and some of them are engaged in training our police force. Furthermore, East Timor is not interested in a formal treaty alliance with anyone.

We have talked with all ASEAN countries already about membership. This is the second time I have come to Singapore. The first time was earlier in 2000, with Xanana Gusmao. Gusmao and I also visited Indonesia, Brunei, Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia on that trip. We have yet to visit Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Burma but we have met with the foreign ministers of all of them in different settings. In Bangkok's ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and the UNTAC 10th Meeting all of them said they would welcome East Timor's eventual membership. The Malaysian Foreign Minister was in East Timor with a very large delegation in June 2000. In response to the question about East Timor joining ASEAN, he said, "We are just waiting and when they are ready, we will welcome them." So the response has been very positive and encouraging.

Question:

John O'Callaghan (Reuters): You were saying that you got a large amount of international sympathy and obviously you are using that momentum to make as many friends as possible. But you also said that traders have no ideology. Are you not worried that East Timor is ripe for exploitation, and that you may be forced into taking deals that perhaps you would otherwise not want to take?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

We hope to resist that sort of situation. East Timor has been swamped with business people, particularly from Australia, who bring in containers and try to declare them as hotels and this is the extent of their investments. However we do have some very good investors from Australia, including some very caring people who really want to help. Likewise, we also have some exceptionally good proposals from Portugal. Anyway, what I need to say is that we have, in this world of business, all kinds of people. We are naive, we are innocent, and I know many of us will be completely fooled. I was told by the Minister of Petroleum in Angola that many years ago he went with a delegation to Georgia in the United States at the invitation of some business groups who came to Angola. He was very impressed that this company was very rich; they even had their own helicopter (with their name on it) and their own office. But the Angolan delegation were told to put in a few million dollars in advance. In short they were totally ripped off because the company did not exist. The Americans concerned had actually rented the helicopter and the office just to impress them. And this is a country that has had an established oil industry. So I would not be too surprised if some of our business people and officials get persuaded to sell half of East Timor. But we will rely on advice from friendly countries that are seconding to us some of their best officials. We are also sending people to train here in Singapore (in general, we have three or four people). We are joining a programme with the IMF in order to send others overseas for training. We are trying to catch up with capacity-building, and skill development for the East Timorese; something we have not been able to do for many centuries. I have no doubt that mistakes will be made.

Question:

Shawn Pang (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies): I came across a statement in this morning's newspaper and according to my understanding it says that if ASEAN does not take care of East Timor, then the mafia influence will grow — although some already operate there. What are your opinions on that statement?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

I have also seen this statement this morning. The few mafia groups or organized criminals we had came from Indonesia anyway. Fortunately we are not yet plagued with mafia. Criminality in East Timor, according to the UN's civilian police (CIVPOL) is the lowest in the developing world. In spite of the high rate of unemployment and extreme poverty, criminality remains surprisingly low. If one goes to East Timor, to any particular rural district, you do not find a single beggar. Dili, the capital, which today has a temporary population of 180,000 (more than under Indonesian rule) is home to very few beggars. It tells one a lot about the pride of the East Timorese people. People prefer to go to the garbage dump to pick up whatever they can get rather than beg for money. We do not have the problem of major crime in East Timor. However we have some gangs who extort money from the people, but are very amateurish. It does not mean that it will not become a problem, and that East Timor will not become a breeding ground for money laundering, drug smuggling or terrorism. Today, in discussion with the Singaporean Minister for Home Affairs, I raised the idea of Singapore helping us in the field of fighting organized crime. We want to send people here to learn from Singapore's experience. It is one of the few places in the world where organized crime does not exist. It is the source of the international community and a serious problem in Europe. For example the Nordic countries are totally incapable of dealing with organized crime because of their very strict laws with respect to human rights and so on. They are totally ill prepared to deal with organized crime. The Netherlands has the same problem. Organized crime from the Balkans, and Central and Eastern Europe is penetrating Europe. So far we do not have this problem.

Question:

Dr Ramos-Horta, this morning I tried to find out the population of East Timor and I found many different numbers, ranging between 500,000 to 800,000. There are also so many different numbers on the people who died after East Timor broke free from Indonesia. Do you have an official statistic?

Mr Ramos-Horta:

I cannot say with any precision the current population numbers in East Timor. But the last Indonesian census indicated a population of about 840,000 in East Timor for 1999, and that is fairly accurate. Investigations so far have suggested that at least 1,000 died in September 1999 alone. There is not yet a real figure in terms of the current population in East Timor today. Indonesian figures talk about 120,000 refugees still in the camps in West Timor but I personally, and many of my colleagues, do not believe that figure. We believe it is much lower than that. The governor of West Timor, who is a very decent man, Mr Pieter Tallo, also suggested that the figure was inflated because many Indonesians joined the queue of refugees in order to receive assistance. No one has done any real registration of the refugees so no one knows. One of my colleagues in East Timor, Mr Mario Carrascalao, Vice President of CNRT, was governor of East Timor for ten years under Indonesia. He knows Indonesia's statistics and East Timor's population better than anyone does. He has done his own assessment based on different figures. He does not believe that refugees in West Timor are more than 50,000-60,000 either. When he looked at the current figure in East Timor from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and the CNRT (the National Council of Timorese Resistance), there are almost 800,000 people back in East Timor now. So Indonesia's figure of more than 100,000 does not match. It would mean that we have far more people now than we actually had in 1999. But I would say that 800,000 is as close an assessment as one can make of East Timor's population as a whole which includes those still residing in West Timor.

NOTE

1. I always use the name Gus Dur instead of President Abdurrahman Wahid based on our very personal relationship.

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