

## **Australian Ambassador Event Speech – 5 December 2024**

When Australian peacekeepers arrived in Timor-Leste leading INTERFET forces in late September 1999, they helped bring an end to the violence and destruction that followed the Popular Consultation. They also signalled the arrival of a timely international humanitarian assistance program.

At that time, Australia's support for international humanitarian efforts was our largest contribution to a humanitarian crisis. And it signalled the start of what we are here today to remember and reflect upon: 25 years of development cooperation between Australia and Timor-Leste.

That first phase of Australia's development assistance centred on emergency assistance. By the time the international humanitarian response had concluded in mid-2000, Australia's support had already transitioned to reconstruction and development assistance. Australia is proud to have played a part in supporting the restoration of independence and assisting early reconstruction efforts. This was followed by support to the impressive state building efforts led by Timor-Leste, and a deepening of our cooperation in the years since.

We have watched Timor-Leste, a young country, emerge as a strong and stable democracy with an open and liberal economy, and steady progress on human and economic development. Freedom of press and public access to information supports lively public debate. We are also impressed to see how Timor-Leste has also sought, generously, to share your experience and expertise with other conflict-affected states through a leading role in the G7+.

Our partnership with Timor-Leste is profoundly important to Australia. As Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong said last year, we matter to each other because we share a region and a future. The stability, security, resilience, and prosperity of our two countries will always be interconnected.

Our partnership is centred on supporting Timor-Leste's own priorities, programs and policies. As Timor-Leste's institutions and systems have matured, Australia has shifted support to a system strengthening approach – supporting government as it builds capacity, efficiency and sustainability. There are many notable achievements.

Following the COVID-19 crisis, Australia provided direct budget support to government to help boost economic recovery. This model recognises the strengths of Timor-Leste's financial management and reporting systems, and we have continued to provide budget support to this day.

Tonight, as we celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of development cooperation, I am also pleased to announce the launch of the new Australia-Timor-Leste Development Partnership Plan. This Development Partnership Plan reflects our shared priorities for the next five years, and important principles for how we work together. Thanks to all of you here who contributed during consultations.

The IXth Constitutional Government of Timor-Leste has a clear agenda. Australia's development program is firmly aligned with these priorities, and the Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030.

Our development partnership today and into the future is based on mutual respect, shared interests, and accountability. A commitment to locally led development remains at the heart of our cooperation, consistent with the value Timor-Leste places on country-led and owned development and the principles guiding international engagement, as outlined by the g7+ in the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.

Over the next five years, the Australian Government will implement important changes to our development partnership with Timor-Leste particularly:

- Scaling up support to Timor-Leste's blue economy;
- Investing further in skills development and reintegration of Timorese PALM workers to lift employment opportunities back home;
- Investing more in private sector development; and
- providing enhanced support for community resilience.

Alongside these changes, we will continue to support key government priorities, including quality service delivery in health and education; and support for economic growth and diversification, connectivity, and climate change adaptation. Australia will also continue cooperation that supports Timor-Leste's stability, security and resilience, and supports all Timorese to equally thrive and prosper.

Recognising the critical role civil society organisations play in advocating for reforms and improving universal access to essential services, we will also provide targeted support to civil society organisations.

Please enjoy the rest of the evening and take some time to visit the booths, which we hope will give you a small taste of the breadth and depth of Australia and Timor-Leste's development partnership.

Obrigada.