

TAIWAN AND EAST TIMOR: HUMAN RIGHTS, RULE OF LAW, SELF-DETERMINATION

JosRamos-Horta
1996 Nobel Peace Prize CO-Laureate

I have followed with great interest over the years your struggle for freedom, democracy, of self determination. I have also been impressed by the enormous material progress made on this island by its hard working and dedicated people.

Taiwan is an encouraging example in nation building to many, an economic success story, making it a mini economic superpower in the world. It has a highly educated population, probably one of the highest number of Ph.D.s per capita of any country, earned in top universities the world over. It has a high quality of life, as I have been able to see in these last few days. But most important, Taiwan is an example in political terms. The peaceful process of democratization which has taken place here in recent years is an inspiration to many, not only in Asia, but throughout the world. The respect for human rights and the rule of law which has been achieved proves the universality of fundamental values, negating the false arguments of the authoritarian and oppressive regimes in this region which pretend that such values are culturally alien. The courageous Taiwanese who have defended freedom and democracy, many spending years in jail for their convictions are proof of the universality of such higher value. I pay homage to these heroes, some of which are among us here today.

There are many parallels between East Timor and Taiwan. Not only were both island nations reached by the intrepid Portuguese seafarers in the 15th century, leaving behind their cultural influence. East Timor has half the surface area of Taiwan, with a population about one twentieth of yours. East Timor continues to suffer to this day under the brutal foreign military occupation by Indonesia. This keeps us poor, despite our country's vast natural resources, prevents our culture and language from developing and keeps the population living in state of terror, exposed to genocidal pressures, which have caused up to one third of our people (some one quarter of a million people) to die. Many others have had to flee abroad to seek acceptable living conditions and security. Taiwan, though not occupied, lived through a brutal dictatorship and colonization that threatened its indigenous inhabitants.

There is also a direct link that binds us. For many years Taiwanese people have had an important presence in East Timor, having been actively involved in its economy. The Taiwanese community was the largest single nonindigenous one in the territory until the invasion by Indonesia in 1975. Many were then massacred by the aggressor and most of the remainder chose to leave in following years. Up to 1975, Taiwan maintained a consulate and primary school in the territory. The Taiwanese and Indonesian consulates being the only ones present there. Close links with Taiwan were maintained by the resident Taiwanese, with people regularly traveling between both places. Many young people came to study in Taiwan. Nowadays, Taiwanese East Timorese that have moved to countries like Portugal and Australia, continue to maintain an interest in the fate of East

Timor, support the resistance effort against Indonesian occupation, and long to return to the country of their birth.

A few months ago, I received in a letter jointly signed by Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and President Vaclav Havel, with an invitation to participate in a historic gathering in Prague in September under the theme, Forum 2000: Concerns and Hopes on the Threshold of the New Millennium. I believe that each of us, as we prepare to enter the Third millennium, might wish to reflect on what has been the last hundred years of the history of humanity, on the extraordinary positive achievements in every level of human activity but also on the darker side of our humanity.

From the time when daring Portuguese navigators sailed out of the Tagus river in early XV century to the Apollo missions in the 60's, the advances in transport and communications technology have been astounding. But the scientific and technological progress also brought about incalculable destruction and suffering. The slave trade which uprooted an estimated ten million Africans from their beloved villages in West Africa was made possible in part by the scientific knowledge acquired in sea voyage. The genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and Australia must also be weighed in our reflection.

However, the magnitude of the destruction brought about by human beings did not begin and end with the slave trade and the colonization of the Americas, Africa and Australia. The greatest leap in scientific progress has been registered in this century of ours that is coming to an end.

However this century has also been witnessed to some of the worst barbarism that human kind is capable of. The genocide of the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, the Jewish holocaust in the 40's, and apartheid in South Africa and the Chinese occupation and destruction of Tibet are among the most serious crimes of this century. Helen Fein, a leading authority on genocide, quoted in a recent in Newsweek article (August 4, 1997, page 2), identified a long list of countries where at least partial genocide has taken place in the 50 years. She listed Burundi, Sudan, Uganda, Cambodia, East Timor, Ethiopia, Iraq and Bosnia among others.

The immorality of the arms trade Crimes occur in places far away from the peaceful and prosperous shores of the Western democracies, but in reality, these are the same countries who encourage it. Since the end of World War II, more than 20 million people in the developing world have died as a direct result of the sale of weapons from the rich nations of the North to the less affluent nations of the South.

In May this year in New York I joined Oscar Arias, the former president of Costa Rica and fellow Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Weisel(1986 NPP), His Holiness the Dali Lama (1989) and many other Laureates in launching the International Code of Conduct on Arms transfers. This is the first initiative by a commission of Nobel Peace Laureates we have established to promote peace, and we will press the UN , the US, the EU and all arms-producing countries to adopt it. If adopted, it would ban weapons transfers to countries that do not comply with international human rights standards, international humanitarian principles and the rule of law.

The international arms trade is a problem of a magnitude that needs to be addressed urgently. The sale of conventional arms to the developing world totaled US \$ 21 billion in 1995. Wealthy nations, accounted for 93% of all weapons exports in 1994. The United States alone accounted for

well over half, at 56%. In 1993, the US exported 73% of all arms sold to the developing world. Ninety per cent of the recipients were not democracies, and two thirds were characterized by the US State Department as human rights violators. In 1994, total military expenditure in the developing world totaled US\$ 242 billion. These are the countries that can least afford the high-tech implements of death being marketed by the rich democracies of the North. In the developing world, 1.3 billion people are unable to meet their most basic needs. Two million children die annually of preventable or curable diseases; 192 million children are malnourished, and 900 million people can not read or write. The five Permanent Members of the Security Council--who are supposed to guarantee peace and security in the world--are the ones who most fuel the arms race, who most profit from the sale of weaponry- if there can be any ethics at all in such a business. China and Russia are also among the most irresponsible arms dealers, whose trade is not restrained by ethical considerations.

The progress in the human rights struggle

In looking at our past, we must also recognize that significant advances have been made in the last 50 years in the global struggle for human rights and the rule of law. The international community through the UN and at regional level has developed an impressive mass of binding international legislation and protection mechanisms that were unthinkable in the past. Awareness about human rights is now much more widespread than ever before and victims have learned how to make use of the existing international procedures for protection of human rights. For instance, the UN HR Center in Geneva receives each year about 500,000 letters, reports, faxes, telegrams denouncing cases of human rights violations from every corner of the globe. As the world becomes a village through the extraordinary revolution in the field of international information and communications, crimes such as the slave trade, colonization and genocide of the indigenous peoples in the past centuries are no longer possible. Gross and systematic abuses of human rights violations occurring in many countries do not escape public attention. TV networks like CNN or radio transmitters such as the BBC and other important short wave broadcasting systems reduce the isolation and distance between peoples, connect millions of peoples around the world. Tyrants that were immune to international scrutiny only a decade ago are no longer safe. An event taking place in a remote village of Burma soon finds its way to the world through the air waves or the Internet. As much as the struggle for human rights and the rule of law remains a daunting task, I am optimistic because the world is becoming smaller for tyrants.

However, in this particular region, there are some individuals in power who are attempting to derail the gains made by the international community. In the recent meeting in Malaysia between the ASEAN countries and its Western cooperation partners, Prime Minister Mahatir of Malaysia and Foreign Affairs Minister of Indonesia declared war on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, perhaps one of the main jewels produced by our century. Both leaders claimed that it is a document representing a minority, non Asian, view point.

This is the time for us to celebrate the 50th anniversary of this historic document. Instead we are all being challenged by Mahatir, Suharto, Lee Kuan Yew, Li Peng, the SLORC, Rafsanjani and

Saddam Hussein, that the Universal Declaration should be revised to accommodate their views that Asians have their own human rights and cultural values different from those from Europe, Latin America and Africa.

These are not new arguments. Throughout the sixties and seventies, we heard the argument that human rights and fundamental freedoms were a Western concept which stood against the collective rights espoused by the communist bloc. Communist leaders obviously did not ask their populations. Ironically with the collapse of the communist bloc this argument has been appropriated by certain Asian regimes, a mixed bag of military dictatorships, Islamic autocrats that have a perverted interpretation of the Koran and few remaining Stalinist Jurassic Park creatures.

As the worst human rights violators in the world form an alliance of their own, led by countries such as China, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Cuba and Sudan to undermine the UN human rights system, Egos and democratic governments of the North and South must summon inspiration and resources towards a concerted strategy to advance the cause of human rights. Only such an alliance will defeat the forces of tyranny that persist in denying millions of people the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms enjoyed in the wealthier nations of the North and here in Taiwan.

The human rights debate is not a conflict between the rich North and the impoverished South. It is a struggle of principles between fully-fledged democracies, who rule with the consent of their people, and the few remaining Stalinist, quasi dictatorial and military regimes that do not. Countries in all parts of the world, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica in Latin America, or South Africa, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Botswana in Africa, or the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, South Korea and India stand out as proof that human rights, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and democracy are universal values, that they go hand in hand with economic development. In none of the countries mentioned, human rights and the rule of law are fully respected. But real efforts are made by all to build a better society, such as is the case in Taiwan, since the dark times of authoritarian rule began to end over one decade ago.

Human rights are not only a moral imperative. Human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are also the only real guarantee of peace and stability that are necessary for economic progress. Ultimately, a repressive regime that oppresses its people, denies the right of workers to form independent trade unions, suppresses academic freedom and freedom of expression, is not a reliable partner.

In an authoritarian or totalitarian state without an elected parliament, independent judiciary, a free and dynamic media, corruption becomes pervasive, saps the resources of the country. Personal and family fortunes are accumulated, the gap between the rich and poor is wider and wider. Examples abound in this region, Africa and Latin America that confirm that human rights and rule of law are not abstract notions.

Human rights and national interest

I understand the difficulties in managing inter-state relations in a changing and volatile world, increasingly smaller, competitive and interdependent. I imagine ourselves in political and business

leadership in a free and independent East Timor, trying to reconcile the many and often conflicting interests in relation to other countries. But I believe that national interests cannot be defined only in terms of trade advantages and other quantifiable gains. A country is worth its name if it can be respected for its independence and integrity, adherence to ethics and principle in its relation to other countries, prepared to politely but firmly to disagree with its friends.

An interesting example is provided by the non-permanent UN Security Council elections last October. If the prestige and influence of a country derive solely from its size, economic and military might, Australia should have easily defeated Portugal in the tight race for a seat in the UN Security Council. There were two vacant seats for the Western group and three contestants, Portugal, Sweden and Australia. Even if Portugal could not measure up to Australia in terms of size and economic clout, and Australia's major advantage over Portugal that on the basis of proportional geographic representation the two Security Council seats should be divided between one European and one Pacific region country, Australia in the end lost, the vote turning in favor of Portugal by a margin of more than 50 votes.

Portugal's dignified stance in the issue of East Timor played a part in its victory, while Australia's unprincipled support for the Indonesian dictatorship played a role in its defeat. Other factors were the fact that small countries like Norway, Sweden, Ireland, The Netherlands, Portugal, Costa Rica, to mention but a few carry considerable influence in the multilateral organizations not because of their size and economic clout. They have gained respect and influence from a coherent policy of standing for human rights and the interests of the poorer countries of the South. The promotion of human rights might sometimes require a public and frank statement reflecting the concerns of a country. As it is the case in life, sometimes we win, sometimes we lose. Sometimes we have to pay a certain price for what we believe in.

As a teenager back in East Timor, I remember hearing the dramatic story of the 1973 Arab oil embargo against Israel and the West. One country after the other succumbed to blackmail. Japan caved in. One tiny European country was at one point the center of world attention. The whole world was watching and waiting the Dutch decision whether it would bow to the OPEC demand that it boycott Israel. The Netherlands stood firm and we all admired its courage. At stake was also the survival of a small nation that was persecuted and humiliated for hundreds of years. It would have been easier and expedient for the Dutch to sacrifice Israel in the altar of Realpolitik and pragmatism as it did happen in the 30's.

The Jewish holocaust and Realpolitik

The Jewish holocaust could have been prevented by the powers that be at the time, namely the US, France and the UK. Reports of persecution of Jews in Germany and elsewhere in Europe were reaching European capitals and Washington. There were confidential reports warning about the rising tide of Nazism and persecution of Jews.

In 1939, a boat carrying 900 Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany was anchored off Florida waiting for clearance to land. After two weeks they were told that were not welcome and the boat

was turned back. The prevailing policy at the time in the US and UK was that Hitler should not be confronted. Appeasement was the preferred option, dictated by Realpolitik. The Jews were after all an expendable people in the grand scheme of national interests. More than six million Jews and hundreds of thousands gypsies were murdered because those would could have stopped the evil chose appeasement.

It was pragmatism that drove the West to support Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war in the 80's. For the practitioners of Realpolitik, Saddam Hussein was a moderating influence in the Gulf region that could contain the spread of Islamic fundamentalism from Iran. Even when the world watched in horror the gassing of thousands of Iranian Kurdish women and children by the Iraqi air force, the West continued to chose pragmatism over principles.

As early as February 1990, US and European diplomats were busy in the UN CHR trying to stop a draft resolution on the human rights situation in Iraq. Their argument was that significant progress in human rights was being made in Iraq. A few months later, Saddam Hussein became the worst evil in the world when his troops invaded Kuwait.

The struggle for Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific region

The movement for democracy, human rights and rule of law is irreversible. Even in this region unprecedented events are taking place. The overthrow of the military dictatorship in South Korea is of enormous significance for democracy and the rule of law in the entire Asia region. The brave people of Korea who endured decades of dictatorship, won the struggle for democracy by peacefully confronting the troops in the streets of Seoul and Kwangju.

For the first time in the history of Asia, former heads of states and other leaders are being prosecuted for their crimes whilst in office. South Korea has challenged the myth of national security interest, which allows leaders to imprison, torture and murder with impunity.

The situation in Burma

The situation in Burma demands action beyond the annual ritual of the UN General Assembly and Commission on Human Rights resolutions. The military junta in Burma which defrauded the Burmese people and the international community should be denied a seat in the UN General Assembly, as the South African apartheid regime was denied a seat in the past.

In the late 70's, the ASEAN countries, supported by the US, also succeeded in blocking recognition of the government installed in Phnom Penh after the Vietnamese intervention in 1978. If the international community wishes to move beyond rhetoric and send a clear signal to the SLORC, the denial of its credentials by the GA Credentials Committee is one course of action to be considered.

Taiwan, democracy, self determination, and its international role I hold the greatest admiration for China's thousands of years old great cultural tradition. I also have admiration for the

achievements since 1949 of the People's Republic of China. After having been humiliated for centuries by foreign powers, China has rebuilt itself into a superpower, with a rapidly growing economy and military might. But the life of a country is not only about the possession of nuclear weapons and economic statistical growth. The PRC has failed completely in the field of civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms, of which in contrast, Taiwan is an encouraging example.

Since the dark days when the forces of the KMT retreated to Taiwan in 1949, this country has first overcome economic backwardness, building itself into an economic power of top rank in the world. It has then managed to peacefully overcome the political repression which had characterized it and had made it into a pariah state in the world. Through peaceful means Taiwan has now achieved a democracy respectful of human rights and the rule of law.

Taiwan has impressively developed its human resources, reaching highest standards of achievement and excellence in many fields of human endeavor. I was very privileged, three days ago in Taipei to meet a distinguished Taiwanese fellow Nobel Laureate, awarded to him for his work in the field of Chemistry, Professor Dr Lee Yaun-che. It has been a while since I have enjoyed the stimulating company of as many brilliant and highly qualified people, holders of numerous PhDs from the finest academic institutions all over the world, as in the last few days since arriving here.

Taiwan has also made important contributions to the economic welfare and technical development of many countries in the world. I hope that Taiwan will increasingly support and assist those fighting to uphold the respect of fundamental values and principles of freedom and human rights in the world, be they NGOs, liberation movements, resistance movements such as ours, or other groups working for the preservation of values of freedom and human rights in the world. It is regrettable that Taiwan, for all its economic might and other achievements such as its democratic development, is kept outside the main decision making bodies in the world, like the United Nations.

In the almost three decades since 1971 the PRC has held its rightful place in the world community. Its admission to the UN was, however, at the expense of Taiwan. It is regrettable that at the time of the PRC was given its place at the UN, no compromise could be found that would assure a dignified place to the Taiwanese entity. However, the claim of the KMT government that it was the only legitimate representative of the whole of China, as well as the PRC's own intransigence, made a compromise impossible.

The world has changed dramatically in the last two decades, as Taiwan itself has undergone profound changes. A new strategy must be found to give Taiwan a voice in the international community.

I believe that the granting of observer status to Taiwan in the UN would be a first step towards making justice to the 21 million people of this important island nation. Observer status does not need to be an end in itself, closing all future options. Taiwan could in future be united with China in any treaty arrangement to be agreed upon through dialogue and negotiation, and reflecting the will of the people. Or Taiwan could be accepted as a sovereign state, a full fledged member of the international community. The limits to the Taiwan- China relationship are only set by people's creativity and ability to work out a political and legal framework that satisfies all parties. It is the people of Taiwan, making use of their right of self determination, a peremptory norm in international law, which should

decide the future that best suits them.

Observer status at the UN, as an initial step, could satisfy most currently held points of view. For those wanting the full independence of a sovereign Taiwan, observer status would be seen as the first step in that direction. Observer status does not mean that those seeking a union with China need to be disappointed. After all, UN observer status is enjoyed by states (Switzerland, The Vatican among others), liberation movements (PLO, SWAPO and ANC in the past), or non-government organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Who knows what could happen in 5, 10 or 20 years from now? But the admission of Taiwan to the UN with observer status must be pursued in a security, strategic and political framework which appeases China. China's legitimate sensitivities should be respected, so that it does not perceive Taiwan's access to the UN as part of yet another international plot against China. In my humble opinion, one of the main pre-conditions for this would be that Taiwan drops the mythical claim that it represents China. China represents China, and Taiwan represents the people of this distinct territory.

The international community would greatly benefit from Taiwan's association with the UN. Specialized agencies would benefit from Taiwan's technical and economic expertise. The security climate of the region would improve, as Taiwan's membership in the UN through observer status gives it extra responsibilities. I also do not believe that Taiwan's UN observer status would be detrimental to China's interests. The UN framework can be best utilized by the two entities to foster mutually beneficial dialogue and cooperation.

While it is necessary to understand China's history, its bitter, humiliating past experience of being occupied and invaded by foreign powers, I view with alarm the present arms build up by the PRC, as does every country in the region and the world. The perception in the region is that China is the number one threat. This leads to unspoken military alliances or security arrangements, which in turn seem to confirm to China its perception of a hostile alliance against it.

Taiwan's long exposure to the outside world, its understanding of many cultures, including its Chinese heritage, makes it ideally suited to be China's best advocate and ally in bridging the differences between China and Japan, China and the US, and other countries. Taiwan would be the most suited country in the region to play this role, so important as long as a security and diplomatic framework has not been agreed to by all parties. I also believe, against my own personal convictions about disarmament, that Taiwan has all the legitimacy to pursue a convincing armed deterrence policy.

The globalization of China's economic interests, the interdependence of the economies of the Asia-Pacific region and indeed of the world, diminish the threat of war. A Chinese military intervention would cause the disintegration of China as we know it today. The US, Japan, and in fact no country in the region, could sit back and watch a Chinese military intervention against Taiwan. I believe that China's own self preservation would prevail over any temptation to use force.

The people of Taiwan have endured and survived great challenges in their past history, which have made Taiwan become the exemplar country it now is. I firmly believe that your entrepreneurship, resilience and creativity will again prevail, allowing you to find your just place in the international community, and free you from the unjust threats and apprehensions under which

you are at present forced to live.

Allow me now to turn to the question of East Timor, which has some important parallels with your case. For a better understanding of the conflict I will set it in its historical and geopolitical context.

The Cold War context

You might recall a picture that made headlines in the spring of 1975. I am referring to the picture of an American helicopter landing on the rooftop of the US Embassy in Saigon to rescue remaining diplomats, CIA operatives and a few privileged South Vietnamese stooges as Saigon fell to the Vietcong. Cambodia and Laos followed. This picture illustrated better than a thousand words the ignominious American retreat from Indochina.

It was in this geopolitical context that President Gerald Ford and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, visited Jakarta in early December 1975 as part of an Asian tour to reassure Asian leaders that the US would continue to honor its security commitments in Asia. The invasion of East Timor which took place within hours of Ford's departure from Jakarta was a mere footnote in the geopolitical events of 1975. Thousands of East Timorese who died in the days, weeks, months and years that followed were mere footnotes to the Vietnamese and Cold Wars.

In June 1974 I visited Jakarta, in my capacity as secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Timorese Social Democratic Association, that had just been created, less than a month earlier. I had the privilege of meeting with the then Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Mr. Adam Malik. After our third round of talks, Mr. Malik addressed to me a letter which read in part: The independence of every country is the right of every nation, with no exception for the people of (East) Timor; ...whoever will govern in Timor in the future after independence can be assured that the government of Indonesia will always strive to maintain good relations, friendship and co-operation for the benefit of both countries .

The following year, in April 1975, I visited Indonesia again and met with President Suharto's senior adviser, Gen. Ali Murtopo, to whom I reiterated our collective desire to develop friendly relations with Indonesia. Gen. Murtopo reassured me that Indonesia harbored no territorial ambitions over East Timor.

The right of the people of East Timor to self-determination is widely recognized in several UN GA and SC resolutions. Colonized for almost 500 years by the Portuguese, it forged a strong cultural and religious identity, older than the history of Australia, the US and most Latin American and African states. I understand the legitimate concern of countries in preserving their national unity and territorial integrity. Many developing countries, Indonesia being a prime example, experienced a traumatic nation- building process with numerous attempts from within and without to undermine the unity of the state.

More than two decades after the invasion, the problem of East Timor has not disappeared. In 1991, a video camera in the hands of courageous cameraman recorded for the first time one of the man massacres that took place in my country. The massacre of 271 Timorese civilians in Dili on

12 November 1991 was not an isolated incident. It followed a well-documented pattern of gross and systematic human rights abuses in many parts of East Timor perpetrated by members of the Indonesian armed forces. The highest ranking officers in the Indonesian army, in particular, the elite Special Forces Command (Kopassus) and its commander, Brig.-Gen. Prabowo, had full knowledge of, and took active part in, these operations.

The arrogance and brutality of the Indonesian army have been once again demonstrated when, this year, on 23 March 1997, a peaceful assembly was fired on by the army. During a visit to East Timor by the Secretary-General's personal Representative, Ambassador Jamsheed Marker of Pakistan, a group of 250 East Timorese students went to hotel Mahkota in Dili to deliver a petition to Mr. Marker. While most students stayed outside, a small delegation entered the hotel at about 7am requesting to see Ambassador Marker. They were met by an aide to Mr. Marker who received the petition. Suddenly, Indonesian troops and police opened fire on the students inside the hotel. Bayonet and batons were also used against them. Four students were killed and at least 20 were seriously injured.

There is a wealth of evidence which illustrates the routine use of ill-treatment and torture by the Indonesian military. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye, of Senegal, who visited East Timor in July 1994, has detailed a pattern of widespread abuses. His report was preceded by an earlier one by the then Special Rapporteur on Torture, Prof. Peter Kooijmans, of the Netherlands, who happened to be in Dili on 12 November 1991. The US State Department annual report devotes a large section on the human rights situation in East Timor and I commend it for the honest effort in presenting the tragic reality in the territory as it is.

In April of this year the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR) adopted a resolution condemning Indonesia's human rights violations in East Timor, by a majority of 20 against 14 with 18 abstentions. Through this resolution, the International Community sends a clear message to the Indonesian military regime that its brutal occupation of East Timor, torture, summary executions, arbitrary arrests and disappearances must come to an end.

East Timor self-determination

For more than 20 years now, I have argued for a peaceful resolution of the East Timor conflict through dialogue between us and the Indonesian side. These views haven't changed. Our imprisoned leader, Xanana Gusmao, has proposed and reiterated time and again our very basic stance. We remain ready to enter into a process of dialogue with the Indonesian authorities, under the auspices of the United Nations, without pre-conditions, to explore all possible ideas towards a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

In 1992, I articulated a peace proposal, which I believe to be a reasonable way--even if it is not the only one--to end the conflict. This peace initiative was first outlined when I addressed the Sub-Committee on Human Rights of the EU in April 1992 and it remains valid today.

Our vision of an independent East Timor

If in a referendum under UN supervision the people of East Timor vote for independence, I can assure you that the Resistance has matured enough to lead the new country as a responsible member of the international community. Allow me to share with you our vision of an independent East Timor.

East Timor is at the cross-roads of three major cultures: Melanesian which binds us to our brothers and sisters of the South Pacific region; Malay-Polynesian binding us to Southeast Asia; and the Latin Catholic influence, a legacy of almost 500 years of Portuguese colonization. This rich historical and cultural existence place us in a unique position to build bridges of dialogue and co-operation between the peoples of the region. The legacy of our Taiwanese population would, in particular give us a close link to this country.

Portugal

East Timor will maintain close ties with Portugal, a country which colonized us for almost half a millennium, and has shown an abiding commitment to our right to self-determination. Portugal and East Timor will be most valuable partners for ASEAN in its relations with the EU, Africa and Latin America. An independent East Timor will be a solid member of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries encompassing over 200 million people in the five regions of the world. This is a strategic choice based not only on our shared history but also on our common future.

Australia and the Pacific island states

The majority of the East Timorese residents outside the country are in Australia. Here they have found a home and support. We are all grateful for Australia's generosity and the bonds forged during WWII and in the last two decades will last for ever. We are conscious of our geography which compels us to co-exist with our neighbors in this part of the world. We will seek membership in the South Pacific Forum within days of our independence.

Taiwan

The links East Timor has enjoyed in the past with Taiwanese people will be a valuable asset for the future. East Timor will need Taiwanese capital and expertise to develop its rich natural resources, which include minerals, most probably vast amounts of natural oil and gas, and a variety of agricultural produce. East Timorese of Taiwanese origin will be an important link between our country and yours. It is for this reason that I would like to see more of our young people being trained here at this time, in preparation for the day we are free and sovereign.

Neutrality, Zone of Peace and Development

We will not have a standing army. For our external security, we will rely on a Treaty of Neutrality to be guaranteed by the permanent members of the Security Council. We will endeavor with the UN and our neighbors to declare the seas surrounding East Timor a Zone of Peace and Development and work towards total demilitarization of the entire East Asia and Pacific regions.

Rule of Law

We will endeavor to build a strong democratic state based on the rule of law which must emanate from the will of the people expressed through free and democratic elections.

Independent media

We will encourage a free and independent media as the voice of the people, a media that informs and educates, and we believe the media should be as independent as the judiciary. We also believe that there can be no foreign interests controlling the local media.

Human rights obligations

All international human rights treaties will be submitted to the Parliament for ratification. We believe that human rights transcend boundaries and prevail over state sovereignty. We will introduce into the school curriculum at an early stage the subject of human rights. We will actively work with like-minded countries, NGOs and the media to strengthen the UN human rights machinery.

National reconciliation and unity

East Timorese now serving in the Indonesian administration in East Timor, the security forces and police, should not fear an independent East Timor. They will be invited to stay on as their full and active involvement in running the country will be necessary to insure a smooth transition. On day one of independence, we will proclaim a general amnesty and national reconciliation. Our people are fortunate to have outstanding leaders, Xanana Gusmao as the political leader, and Bishops Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo and Basilio de Nascimento, as the spiritual leaders, whose combined moral authority and vision will guarantee that the people of East Timor will heal the wounds of the war and embrace each other and their neighbors .

Economic prospects

East Timor is a relatively small country, half the size of Taiwan. But with an area of 18,889 km² and a total population of 700,000 (1974 figures), it is at least equal to, if not larger, in size and

population, than some 40 independent states. It is four times the size of Brunei and 40 times larger than Singapore. It is potentially self-sufficient in most agricultural goods, meat and fish. It has large reserves of natural gas, manganese and oil.

The invasion up-rooted thousands of people, including the members of the important Taiwanese community. Properties were abandoned, destroyed or sold at unfair prices. This situation will be redressed. A voluntary resettlement plan will be effected to allow the many tens of thousands of displaced East Timorese to return to their ancestral lands.

Health and education

We believe in free education and health care for our people. The money saved from not having a standing army will be well used in these areas. At least 40% of our resources will be allocated to our best resource--our people--through massive investment in health, education and food production. With the co-operation of WHO we will seek to eradicate malaria, tuberculosis and other preventable diseases within a decade.

Indonesian migrants

It is estimated that over 200,000 Indonesians are now living in East Timor. Most are poor Indonesians who came to our country looking for a better life. We would not be true to ourselves if we were to ostracize our poorer neighbors. Indonesian migrants in East Timor will be welcome to stay and with us build a better home for us all. They have brought with them the wealth of their culture which can enrich the whole community.

East Timor and ASEAN

For the past 20 years, the ASEAN countries have turned their backs on us. They should offer their Indonesian neighbor a word of wisdom, pleading with them to seize the olive branch we have been offering since 1974 when I met with Adam Malik. We are as determined as we are optimistic about our future. To Indonesia and our other neighbors in the ASEAN we are offering a hand of friendship and appealing to them to help us bring peace and freedom to East Timor. More pain and misery and loss of lives can be spared, more embarrassment in the international arena can be avoided if ASEAN lives up to its responsibilities.

The way forward

No one is free from responsibility in the East Timor tragedy. Portugal, Australia, Japan, the US, the UK and France, the UN, have all failed the people of East Timor. However, as much as we can assign blame to these countries, we can also understand their motives, indifference and fears. Portugal was severely handicapped by its own internal upheaval in the post-empire period. The US,

having just being forced into a humiliating retreat from Vietnam, was not in a position to play any leadership role on this issue even if it wanted to. My point is that it would serve no useful purpose to assign blame today to any particular country.

We, the East Timorese political leaders, cannot escape our own collective responsibility. We too have failed. In 1974-75, we were immature and irresponsible. Some of us introduced in the country certain political rhetoric that worried Jakarta. The leaders in Indonesia were understandably worried about the possible introduction of communist influence in the territory. The traumatic 1965-66 turmoil in Indonesia and the post-Vietnam profoundly impacted upon the policy-makers in Jakarta.

There is only one truth, one victim, the people of East Timor. More than two decades since Indonesia's intervention, the people of East Timor remain a victim and captive of the Cold War and post-Vietnam politics. They have made it abundantly clear that no amount of force will ever be enough to subjugate its will. I can only pray and hope that those in power in Indonesia can summon enough courage, humility and inspiration from its own epic struggle for independence from the Dutch, and change course.

A few weeks ago I traveled unexpectedly to South Africa. I was summoned by President Mandela for an informal discussion following his historic meeting with Xanana Gusmao. President Suharto displayed wisdom and statesmanship in acceding to Mandela's request to meet Xanana. They met for two hours in the State Guest House.

While I cannot elaborate on my conversation or on Xanana's conversation with President Mandela, I can state that we welcome President's Mandela offer to help. President Mandela did not elaborate to me his own discussion with Suharto. But we can all hope that this is the beginning of a new impetus in the UN-mediated efforts to bring about a resolution of the conflict in East Timor.

The end of empires

The massacre of the Armenian people by the Ottoman empire, the Jewish Holocaust, the wanton killing of the gypsies by the Nazis and the genocide of indigenous peoples in so many regions of the world, stand out as the most barbaric and shameful chapters of human history. Unfortunately, humanity has allowed similar crimes to continue till this very day.

Justice Robert Jackson, Chief Prosecutor of the Nuremberg War Crime Tribunals, said:

“The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant and so devastating, that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated.”

The continuing persecution of the Kurds and the denial of their rights, the slaughter of more than one million peasants and Chinese merchants by the Suharto regime in Indonesia in 1965-66, the mass killings perpetrated by the Pol Pot regime on the Cambodian people, the tragedy in the Great Lakes region, the barbaric violence inflicted on the East Timorese and the peoples of West Papua, Moslems of Aceh, indigenous peoples of Kalimantan, Sulawesi and the Moluccas, the repression of Palestinian rights are an indictment of the entire international community. These

crimes are continuing because those in government allow them to happen. The Jewish Holocaust happened because the powers that be at the time chose pragmatism and appeasement over moral leadership and humanity. The defenseless Jews who were marched to their deaths were a mere footnote to the apologists of Realpolitik and pragmatism in their pursuit of appeasement towards Hitler.

The world has changed dramatically in the last few years and the theorists of irreversibility and status quo have been discredited by the collapse of the USSR. Who would have thought it possible that the great Armenian people, persecuted for hundreds of years would regain a country called Armenia? The entire world conspired against the Eritrean people. Today, Eritrea is a shining example for the rest of the world. Who would have thought that only a year after Vaclav Havel was again arrested in a cold Prague winter in January 1989 that by the end of the year he would be in the presidential palace? Only 10 years ago, not too many people would have imagined that President Mandela would one day emerge as the President of a new South Africa. President Mandela is the living proof that nothing is irreversible, no regime is eternal, empires do not last for ever.

Taiwan has survived and defied all odds. It survived the volatile and dangerous years of the first two decades, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Vietnam, the Cold War. In fact it prospered. Taiwanese indigenous people have suffered a double repression. Today, Taiwan is a prosperous island-state, mini economic superpower with a vibrant democracy and a credible armed deterrence force. As the world watches Chinese behavior towards Hong Kong, the dismantling of the few hard won democratic rights, it can not remain indifferent to Taiwan. This island of democracy can not be allowed to be destroyed.

My dear friends your great little country has shown extraordinary resilience and creativity. I am sure that the day will come when Taiwan gains its rightful place in the international community. The old Taiwanese Consulate building in our capital Dili is still your property. I hope the day will soon come when it becomes a full fledged Embassy of Taiwan in our country, and an independent East Timor opens its own Embassy in your beautiful island of Formosa.

*The original, unedited version of this article was delivered as JosRamos-Horta's keynote speech at the Conference of the World Federation of Taiwanese Associations, I-LAN, Taiwan, 23 August 1997.