



Fundasaun Mahein (FM), October 30, 2020

## Press Release

### Implementation of the Military Obligatory Services in Timor Leste

As per the Government press release dated 28 October 2020, the VIII Constitutional Government led by Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak approved a new regulation concerning Law on Obligatory Military Service (*Servico Militar Obrigatório* – SMO). The reason given for introduction of SMO is to respond to the needs of the Timor-Leste Defense Force (F-FDTL) and the policy of the VIII Constitutional Government.

The implementation of the Obligatory Military Service in Timor-Leste is linked to Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak's promises made during presidential and parliamentary election campaigns in 2012, 2017 and 2018, respectively. In 2012, when then-candidate Taur Matan Ruak was elected as President of the Republic, he began to promote this program, establishing a team led by the *Casa Militar* of the President of the Republic to begin discussions on the topic. Ultimately the SMO program was not implemented, in part because it does not fall under the President's remit, but also because it is unregulated under any legal provision or the Government's program.

In 2018 when Taur Matan Ruak was nominated as Prime Minister of the VIII Constitutional Government, the proposal for SMO was introduced into the government program. However, to date the Government has not carried out any study in order to determine whether the implementation of SMO in Timor-Leste is truly necessary. A strategic perspective on the development of state defense policies demands that the structure and functions of the national defense forces must be based on a thorough analysis of the strategic threats and interests of the state. Therefore, the implementation of a program such as SMO must not be based simply on politicians' hopes and campaign promises, but on detailed study of concrete realities.

Thus, we believe that the SMO program as formulated by the Government, far from responding to the needs of F-FDTL, will hinder the development of our defense force's capacity. Moreover, SMO will put a major burden on our state finances, while diverting limited resources from productive sectors which require urgent investment.

Given Timor-Leste's current reality, it is extremely difficult, albeit not impossible, for the State to sustain a conscripted military force. We therefore emphasise that before embarking on our most ambitious programs, we must carefully and thoroughly study the current reality. Today, we face many difficulties in developing F-FDTL as a professional conventional force, the most important being the financial limitations and budgetary constraints.

Therefore, FM recommends:

1. The Government through the Minister of Defense should prioritize a review of the Planu Força 2020, in order to establish a defense force posture which is realistic and contextual, rather than implementing Military Obligatory Service which will hinder the development of the defense sector and unnecessarily burden the state's expenses.
2. We recommend that the President of the Republic veto the new Regulations regarding the Obligatory Military Service presented by the government, and instead demand that other productive and essential sectors be given priority. This is because Obligatory Military Service lacks any serious cost-benefit analysis and is based instead on political promises, which is an extremely weak basis on which to implement such a major program.

To obtain more information about this subject please contact:

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