

Address by His Excellency the Minister of Defense, Cirilo Cristóvão, on the occasion of the 15th IISS Asia Security Summit, Shangri-La Dialogue

"Timor-Leste's Outlook Towards Emerging Challenges to Small State Security in Asia Pacific", Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore, 30 May 2015

Excellency, Minister for Defence of Papua New Guinea, Dr Fabian Pok,

Commander, New Zealand Chief of Air Force, Air Vice Marshal Michael Yardley,

Deputy Director-General, China-US Defense Relations Research Center, Senior Colonel Zhao Xiaozhuo,

Distinguished guests,

It is a great pleasure to be here today and to share with you Timor-Leste's outlook towards the global security situation in the region, and in particular towards emerging challenges faced by small states in Asia Pacific.

I am looking forward for exchanging with our friends from New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and China, as well as with other nations and partners in the audience. These fora constitute great opportunities to identify common challenges, assess priorities and put forward the way ahead.

It is also the moment to bring to the table the specific issues faced by small states, more often than not neglected or obliterated from the bigger picture, when discussing the contemporary geo-strategic theatre.

It is a pleasure to note that once again the *Shangri-La Dialogue* has included the voices of smaller states in the larger debate. In fact, the visions and idiosyncrasies of countries such as Timor-Leste, and many other small states, - and in particular small island states - can contribute to take better stock of our region and to making a more refined picture of the state of affairs in the Asia Pacific.

Obviously, these specific issues also relate to, and interconnect with, the broader global and regional security context.

With that in mind, let me tell you what are the main six interconnected factors that contribute to Timor-Leste's security outlook. Some you are all too familiar with, some I will address in more detail.

First and foremost, Timor-Leste's assessment of the regional security context, and of the specific emerging challenges to small states in Asia Pacific, follows more recent and broader definitions of security, which encompass notions of human security.

Secondly, we obviously take stock of the shift in power balancing which positions Asia-Pacific as a new center of gravity, and of its impact in terms of Timor-Leste's own positioning within the region and beyond.

Thirdly, Timor-Leste is highly aware and concerned with the proliferation of non-traditional threats; in particular those related to terrorism, transnational crime and maritime security. Timor-Leste is particularly affected by the later two.

Fourth, aside from the global and regional trends in the security context, our country also considers the particular challenges, which small states, like our own, face in this region, in particular those related to environmental sustainability and to economic and energetic security.

Fifth, no one ignores, and we the first, that Timor-Leste is a new country, which successfully emerged from conflict, built its state infrastructure, and is moving steadily towards developing its economy. Stability is at the basis of economic development and history has taught us that it is wise to keep vigilant to our internal security conditions, even in times of peace and prosperity.

Finally, or maybe underlying would be a better word, stand the principles, guidelines and standards for defense and security policy, which emerge from Timor-Leste's Constitution, Legal Framework and Defense White Papers, upon which our current security outlook is based.

I will first briefly present these principles, since they are at the base of everything else. I will spare you going into detail on the broader definitions of human security or on the current geo-strategic positioning of Asia, which have been addressed fully these last couple of days. And will jump right into the specific geo-strategic positioning of Timor-Leste, its main strategic defense priorities and the emerging challenges we face, particularly as a small island state, which is the core of our discussion.

Timor-Leste is a peaceful and stable country. Since the restoration of independence, despite some set backs, we have managed to create an enabling environment for the sustainable development of our nation, which has been continuously improving the living conditions of our citizens.

Timor-Leste is also a nation of peace, committed to establishing good relations with all countries, in particular its neighbors and countries in South East Asia and the Pacific, in respect for sovereignty and the integrity of nations. Timor-Leste is also committed to contribute, albeit modestly, to peace and stability at the international level (we have participated in UN peacekeeping operations in South Sudan and Lebanon).

As you all know, Timor-Leste is currently in the process of accession to the ASEAN; many of our reforms in the defense and security sectors meet the requirements for the political and security pillar of that Organisation. By joining ASEAN; our country is committed to also contribute at a regional level to peace and stability.

Our nation is located in the strategic triangle between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, at the confluence of important and busy international maritime routes. The growing use of sea routes and exploitation of maritime resources increases Timor-Leste political and strategic potential, placing us in a pivotal position between Asia-Pacific and South-East Asia.

Being a half-island nation, the sea is a strategic priority for Timor-Leste, and constitutes a vital component in its economic, environmental, energetic and human security. Setting a proper framework, defining operational guidelines and building the capacity of our security forces is thus essential for the protection of our resources, as well as safety and security at sea.

In fact, one of the major difficulties our country faces today is the protection of its maritime resources, both living - such as fisheries - and non-living - such as oil and gas.

Transnational crime, including illegal fishing and trafficking of goods are problems that affect Timor-Leste. There is need to improve our maritime surveillance systems and to increase capabilities in this field, particularly in the defense forces Naval component. Ensuring secure Sea Lines of Communication is also an essential part of this strategic objective.

Our country also faces the issue of the definition of its maritime borders; which should be defined in compliance with International Law and in particular the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Timor-Leste considers that disputes arising from maritime borders definition should be addressed and solved through dialogue, in compliance with International Law.

The challenge of maritime security is a challenge faced by most, if not all, small states in Asia Pacific. In particular, small island development states, which heavily depend on the sea, at many levels, for their sustainable development.

The constraints faced from being island nations put a higher pressure on the protection of natural resources.

In fact, island nations often face the common interconnected challenges of narrow resource bases - depriving them of economies of scale -, high costs for energy, infrastructure and transportation; high dependence on external markets; and fragile natural environments; just to name a few. All these are potential sources of social or political instability if not addressed properly.

Other issues that have been emerging as considerable challenges are those of climate change vulnerability, access to fresh water and water resource management, waste management and environmental quality.

Environmental security, disaster preparedness and emergency response are all areas of vital importance to small states in the Asia Pacific, considering their particular

vulnerability to natural disasters, and the tendency for these events to increase in number and in intensity.

Timor-Leste has been engaging in exercises with different partners in the region, such as the United States, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Community of Portuguese speaking countries.

These exercises constitute excellent opportunities to share experiences and to consolidate practices, which are essential for the development of our defense forces which aspire to be specialized modern forces for times of peace.

In fact, Timor-Leste has been investing in developing small but professional defense forces, and is trying to consolidate its naval, engineering and medical components in order not only to appropriately address the challenges it faces but also to honor its broader commitments to peace and stability.

Military to military cooperation has been a core area in the field of defense cooperation, contributing not only to the training and capacity-building of the defense forces, but also to the consolidation of its doctrines, in line with those of its partners and friends.

Timor-Leste has been developing defense cooperation activities with different partners in the region and beyond, in particular in training and capacity building, with Australia, Brazil, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, Singapore, USA and many others, either through formal agreements or through the good offices of Foreign Affairs, Defense and the Military.

Our country is well aware of its limited military capabilities in facing global security challenges. Multilateral cooperation is increasingly indispensable and Timor-Leste is fully committed to joining this trend and developing its defense cooperation, in particular its maritime cooperation. We are looking forward to further expand our relations with partners from the Asia Pacific region.

Defense diplomacy, mutually beneficial defense cooperation and confidence-building, in particular through formal state relations and long term people to people relations, are all part of the broader strategy for building a sustainable peaceful and prosperous future in Timor-Leste and in the region.

Ultimately, we aim at creating an enabling environment, where people feel safe and secure, where all can profit from economic development and have access to the benefits of globalization, technology and scientific research, where all are free from injustice and impunity, and are capable of fully enjoying their rights and of actively engaging in their responsibilities as citizens.

Thank you.