



**MINISTÉRIO DOS NEGÓCIOS ESTRANGEIROS E COOPERAÇÃO  
SECRETÁRIO DE ESTADO PARA OS ASSUNTOS DA ASEAN**

**KEY NOTE SPEECH BY:  
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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ASEAN AFFAIRS  
ROUND TABLE MEETING  
ORGANISED BY THE ASIA FOUNDATION TIMOR-LESTE  
DILI, 24<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2013**

H.E. US Ambassador to Timor-Leste, Mrs. Judith Fergin,  
H.E. Former Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation,  
Mr. Zacarias Albano da Costa

Distinguished Speakers;

Prof. Leonard Sebastian

Dr. Rahimah "Ima" Abdulrahim

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Mr. Herjuno

Ms. Susan Marx

Directors and Representatives from Civil Society Organisations in Timor-Leste

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be here today delivering this key note speech on: *"Engage Timor-Leste's Civil Society Organisations in ASEAN Roadmap and Future Engagement"*- a timely theme in Timor-Leste's current foreign policy discourses.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and appreciate the contribution from The Asia Foundation Timor-Leste (TAF-TL) for organizing this very important Round Table Meeting targeting specifically Civil Society Organization (CSOs) in Timor-Leste. Civil Society Organizations are an essential linchpin of development process in this country. Therefore, an active engagement from CSOs in public policy discourse is strongly encouraged.

Excellencies, Distinguished Speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To ensure that this remark is not going to be a rambling one, I have organised this remark into several sections. Firstly, I will briefly touch on definitional conception of civil society, secondly, I will talk about the development of civil society organisations in ASEAN context, thirdly, I will outline Timor-Leste's current preparation towards the membership of ASEAN and explore potential areas of cooperation and contribution from CSOs in the context of Timor-Leste's current and future engagement in ASEAN. A final conclusion will be drawn from this remark.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Engaging in discussion on theoretical conceptions of civil society is an arduous but necessary discussion to pursue. So that it helps to shed some light on this complex interdependent world, specifically in the context of Timor-Leste where there is a proliferation of diverse shapes and forms of civil society. Therefore, defining what constitutes civil society is required.

There has been indeed a great debate about the definitional conception of civil society. Despite this open-ended debate, there seems, still, to be a continued absence of a commonly accepted notion of what really constitutes civil society. In fact, the line of difference between civil society and other forms of organisations is to a large extent quite blurry. What is to be sure of is that there are several characteristics that distinguish civil society organisations from other philanthropic or profit-driven organisations.

What is really the conception of civil society?

There is a wide range of understanding about civil society, but, I found a catchy definitional conception constructed by Cardoso Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations. According to this Panel, civil society:

*“Refers to the associations of citizens (outside their families, friends and businesses) entered into voluntarily to advance their interests, ideas and ideologies. The term does not include profit making activity (the private sector) or governing (the public sector). Of particular relevance to the United Nations are mass organisations (such as associations of peasants, women or retired people), trade unions, professional associations, social movements, indigenous people’s organisations, religious and spiritual organisations, academe and public benefit non-governmental organisations”.*<sup>1</sup>

To make the definition clearer, civil society often refers to self-organised, voluntary, non-profit, non-state actors and organizations that operate in the public arenas. In addition, civil society has several characteristics such as autonomy, voluntary and focused on public good or bona-fide. Again, this definition still remains

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<sup>1</sup> Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations entitled “We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and Global Governance”.

contested. But at least, the definition manages to make a clear distinction between civil society and other state and non-state actors.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have now come to the second section of this remark, which is civil society in ASEAN context. ASEAN came into existence in 1967. The Association since then has expanded its membership and networks of partnerships with various actors around the globe. Surely, ASEAN was established by the five founding states. Despite this state-initiated effort, ASEAN significantly has evolved from a state-centred to what is now called people-centred organisation. This is a very significant development!.

ASEAN is a dynamic organisation. It has enlarged the space for non-state actors to contribute in policy development processes of the organisation. For example, to further recognise the importance of active participation from the entire communities, in the opening of the ASEAN Charter, it clearly states that one of the purposes of ASEAN is:

*“To promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building;”<sup>2</sup>*

A total participation of all sectors is encouraged and enshrined in the ASEAN Charter. This significant development attempts to rebut the criticism that ASEAN has been an elitist-driven organisation. In the contemporary ASEAN, there are various civil society organisations that have become influential players in the region. This is something needs to be encouraged. An active citizenry will assist the governments and states in general in formulating well-informed public policies.

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<sup>2</sup> The ASEAN Charter, Article 1, point 13.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is important to point out that this region is a diverse one. It is rich in diversities in culture, politics, society and economies. Civil society organisations certainly exist in all countries of ASEAN, but some are more influential than others depending on their local contexts. ASEAN has matured to embrace different opinions and views from different sectors. There are several examples where CSOs, or they are often called “Third Sector”, which have played very constructive roles in further strengthening ASEAN, this has, in turn, further reinforced ASEAN to become the central player in regional architecture.

In the context of ASEAN, there are examples of civil society organisations that have played constructive roles and have established close institutional linkages with the decision-makers. They are ASEAN Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), Assembly of the Peoples of ASEAN, ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC), Solidarity for ASEAN Peoples’ Advocacy (SAPA), ASEAN People’s Forum (APF), and ASEAN-Led ASEAN Social Forum. These think-tanks participate actively in contributing to policy discussions in ASEAN.

There are still thousands of civil society organisations that exist in all the member-states ranging from internationally well-known think-tanks in down-town cities to small CSOs that try their best to assist the poorest in rural areas. These organisations contribute according to their respective areas of expertise and interests such as in economic, human rights, education and various other sectors.

Taking into consideration the above conceptual understanding of what constitutes civil society and a general overview of ASEAN-civil society relations, what is then the role of civil society in Timor-Leste? Is there any space at all for CSOs in the context of development process in this country?

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste contains a wide range of citizen's organizations. These organisations encompass religious organisations, mass organizations, cultural and traditional organisations, community organisations as well as the more commonly referred to developmental organisations or NGOs. NGOs are part of civil society but only one limited part of a much wider organisational forms of civil society organisations.

I don't want to delve too much detail into anthropological or political perspectives of what constitutes civil society, but what is obvious is that Timor-Leste has very active civil society organisation. During the Portuguese and Indonesian periods, there were already various civil society organisations in Timor-Leste. After Timor-Leste regained its independence in 1999, there was a proliferation of CSOs specially NGOs in the new country; they come into existence to assist the state in rebuilding the country from scratch. This complementary role from the CSOs is essentially important in nation-building and state-building endeavours. States cannot do it all and alone!

I think this is a good starting point for the very theme of this remark namely: "Engage Timor-Leste's CSOs in ASEAN Roadmap and Future Engagement".

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have set the context of how CSOs in the region engage in ASEAN activities since the inception of the organisation. As an aspiring member of ASEAN, it is certainly essential to know and understand how the organisation engages and interacts with other stakeholders in the region and beyond. To develop this theme, let me begin by laying out what preparations have been conducted and what needs to be done to attain the membership status of ASEAN. In the course of dissecting this theme, I will touch on areas of potential engagement from CSOs.

Let me begin by explaining the very premises that have motivated Timor-Leste to become the eleventh member of ASEAN.

Firstly, ASEAN has become a central linchpin of regional architecture. It came into existence when the world was split into different ideological persuasions; ASEAN played a very constructive role in ensuring that the region did not jump on to this political bandwagon of the major powers. ASEAN succeeded in bringing political stability to the region.

Secondly, over the last four decades of its existence, ASEAN has seen massive engagement and partnership not only with countries in the continent, but it has managed to expand its network of partnerships to the African, European and American continents. To further expand the program and activities of ASEAN and to ensure that ASEAN remains relevant with the rapid changes of today's world, at the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in 2007, leaders of ASEAN affirmed their strong commitment to accelerate the establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015 and signed the Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015.

There is often talk of this century as "The Asian Century", this grand plan of the ASEAN Community by 2015 is a timely one. More importantly, this aspiration will assist the member-state of ASEAN to take coherent, coordinated and harmonised approaches in realising this aspiration. To own this century, Asian countries especially ASEAN countries will have to work as a team to be able to further strengthen ASEAN as a common platform for all countries in the Southeast Asian region, and as a group that speaks with *One Vision, One Identity and One Community* as already enshrined in the ASEAN Community blueprints.

In this very dynamic world, large countries in terms of soft and hard power are unable to stand alone, let alone a small country such as Timor-Leste. In this complex interdependent world, states cannot afford to work in isolation. It requires strong regional and international cooperation. Working in partnership will enable countries to address issues confronting their region in a unified way with a strong voice and be

action orientated. It is this aspiration that Timor-Leste has long dreamed of pursuing through membership status in ASEAN.

Thirdly, Timor-Leste, geographically, is located in Southeast Asia. This geographical proximity creates a strong and close cultural affinity with countries in the region. ASEAN is rich in cultural and social diversity. Timor-Leste's eventual membership in ASEAN will further enrich this diversity. We must be proud of this diversity. History has shown that this diversity has never been a nuisance; it has, in fact, become a norm in pursuing our cooperation. This is reflected in the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste would not only benefit from ASEAN membership, it would also contribute to further promoting and strengthening ASEAN as a central player in the region and the world. Since the restoration of independence in 2002, Timor-Leste has pursued an outward-looking foreign policy. There are several examples of this foreign policy thinking.

Timor-Leste is a main architect of the establishment of the g7+ group. Timor-Leste's Minister of Finance Mrs. Emilia Pires, who is currently chairing this very important group that consists of fragile countries affected by conflict. As we are two years away from the 2015 deadline of the Millennium Development Goals, it is timely to have this group so that small and conflict affected countries have a space to discuss their issues, and if possible attempt to formulate an alternative development paradigm and to influence global policy discourses. This group not only provides a space for small and conflict-affected states, it also serves as a common platform for developing and developed states in the world. As an example, over 40 countries and organisations endorsed the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. As with the g7+ group, another Timorese woman also serves as an elected expert of the 23 experts of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).



Currently, appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Timor-Leste's former President of the Republic, Mr. Jose Ramos Horta is conducting an important mission in Guinea-Bissau as the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau.

Timor-Leste is certainly paying attention to internal issues, but despite this; Timor-Leste is also active player in international affairs. Timor-Leste is also a member of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries; it is a full participant of the ASEAN Regional Forum; and a member of Portuguese-speaking African countries. Timor-Leste is a young and small state, but in a very short period of time, it has managed to expand its network of partnerships and friendships. This experience will surely help Timor-Leste adapt easily to the dynamics of ASEAN.

Timor-Leste's dream to join ASEAN is not a new one. The Founding Fathers of Timor-Leste have long dreamed of bringing Timor-Leste into ASEAN. This dream was interrupted by the occupation. Eventually, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, Timor-Leste officially submitted its membership application to join ASEAN. The timing of the application was not only a very significant diplomatic gesture but a historic one at the time when Indonesia was the Chair of ASEAN. Amongst others factors, Timor-Leste's geographic location and cultural affinity are the primary driving force of Timor-Leste's strong desire to join ASEAN.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I have mainly talked about positive notes. It is worth mentioning development challenges faced by Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste began its development from scratch. Physical infrastructure was almost entirely obliterated by the conflict in the year leading up to and after the 1999 United Nations-supervised referendum; the population did not have the opportunity to improve their lives during the colonisation and occupation. This situation forced the leadership of the country not only to develop physical infrastructure of the country, but to transform the society from one that was greatly affected by the bitter past to a new one that focuses its entire efforts on improving its lives. This is not an easy exercise!. Above all, state-building and nation-building is an open-ended endeavour!.

Fortunately enough, Timor-Leste is blessed with abundant natural resources such as oil and gas. To avoid the so-called “Dutch Disease” or resource curse, Timor-Leste has subscribed to the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) - a global initiative to ensure that countries with oil and gas properly manage their resources in a transparent and prudent manner. Thanks to the active participation from NGOs in EITI.

To further strengthen this commitment of avoiding the ‘resource curse’, the state authorities of Timor-Leste decided to establish a special law called the Petroleum Fund Law. This law is to ensure that the state spends the petroleum revenue in a sustainable manner. These are the best models in managing petroleum resources. Due to its strong commitment in managing petroleum resources, Timor-Leste is often branded as a model for other countries in managing petroleum resources in a transparent, prudent and sustainable manner. These are positive developments that Timor-Leste needs to further strengthen.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To finally gain membership status, Timor-Leste needs to execute necessary plans and requirements.

What are Timor-Leste’s plans and preparations towards ASEAN membership? And what are the roles of CSOs in these efforts?

Firstly, Timor-Leste has, since the restoration of independence in 2002, been engaging actively in conferences, dialogues, meetings, and various forms of activities organized by ASEAN. It is an effort to make sure that Timor-Leste is familiar with the working ways of ASEAN. Timor-Leste is a full participant of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), has so far established six Embassies in six member states, and plans to open an additional four by 2014 thus having diplomatic representation in all ASEAN member states. In addition, an ASEAN Secretariat in Dili and a Working Group has been established to assess all relevant aspects related to the application. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation is also building a

Diplomatic Training Centre, in which we will train our future diplomats and public servants on various skills and knowledge.

Secondly, to ensure Timor-Leste harmonises its policies and laws with what has been established under ASEAN's Economic Pillar, Political-Security Pillar and Socio-Cultural Pillar, further studies and assessments are required.

Two studies have been conducted to assess Timor-Leste's readiness. Firstly, an assessment on the economic development was conducted and supported by the Asian Development Bank at the request of the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta.

Secondly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) produced another assessment on the economic situation of Timor-Leste and how it fits in with the ASEAN Economic Pillar; the study has been presented to the Council of the Ministers of Timor-Leste and has received a full endorsement from the Members of the Council. These endeavours are essential to assess Timor-Leste's readiness to fulfil those objectives already established in the ASEAN Economic Community.

Where do civil society organisations play their roles in this case?

As we all know that ASEAN Economic Community has the goal of creating a single market and production base in the region. I encourage CSOs to assist the government and the state in general to come up with analysis and pay close observation to ensure that the free flow of labour does not create a space for exploitation of migrants or human rights abuses and to come up with an economic analysis to ensure that economic development is not carried out at the expense of future generations.

The final result of the study on economic pillar has also been shared with FONGTIL, the umbrella organisation for NGOs and INGOs in Timor-Leste, we hope that NGOs rigorously study the finding and provide us with necessary feedbacks on how to further prepare Timor-Leste's economic development.

Currently, my Office is undertaking assessment or studies on ASEAN political-security pillar and a rigorous assessment will also be done for the socio-cultural pillar. In undertaking these preparatory assessments, the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and Cooperation of Timor-Leste specially my office (which is mandated by the Organic Law of the Fifth Constitutional Government to execute plans and preparations) will work and collaborate closely with all line ministries, civil society and the public in general to ensure that the government is undertaking a coherent policy and strategy towards achieving the goal of ASEAN membership status.

We have talked to almost every line ministry and relevant state entities such as Anti-Corruption Commission, the Provedore of Human Rights and Justice and some NGOs and CSOs where relevant for this pillar to seek their views on the sector. The goal of this political-security pillar is to create a peaceful, democratic, and harmonious region, CSOs in this case can assist the states in fighting corruption, promoting human rights, rule of law, building support for peaceful conflict resolution and assisting the states in tracking transnational crimes, trafficking drugs. This political-security pillar strongly encourages the member-states to develop modalities for cooperation with various CSOs in the region. That is exactly what we have been doing with CSOs during this assessment.

We will open for further discussion on this with various state and non-state actors after compiling the draft report of this assessment. In this specific pillar, I am pleased to state that Timor-Leste, fortunately, has very dynamic and active CSOs in promoting those universal values and principles. Therefore, Timor-Leste will not face any difficulty in fulfilling the criteria established by the ASEAN Political-Security Community. Once this assessment on political-security pillar is completed, my office will conduct the last assessment on Socio-Cultural Pillar. We will then talk again to state entities and CSOs. Once, my Office has conducted assessment on three pillars of economic, political-security and socio-cultural, we will recommend the final report of these assessments to each and every relevant entity in this country to commence harmonising or synchronising their policies, rules and regulations.

Outreach and awareness program is also part of Timor-Leste's preparation towards the membership. Accession to ASEAN is a national cause, it is not only the business of MNEC or this government, it is, however, the business of the entire society of Timor-Leste. A final admission to the organisation not only would

bring impacts on the government, but on the entire sectors. Therefore, informing and engaging the public in discussion on ASEAN is essentially important.

There are two activities in this program. One is visiting districts in the territory to talk about ASEAN and Timor-Leste's preparations, and second is writing competition on ASEAN affairs. I am pleased share with the great enthusiasm from various sections of community in engaging in debates about ASEAN. ASEAN is aiming to establish ASEAN Community by 2015; therefore, communities at the grass root level are entitled to know about ASEAN and its general evolution.

The writing competition on ASEAN affairs was the first ever academic exercise in Timor-Leste, there were about 200 people registered and 127 participated in the writing competition. This is part of the effort of engaging CSOs in Timor-Leste's preparation. I also would like to take this opportunity to appreciate and thank various CSOs that have participated in these events. These events will be annually held in Timor-Leste during the course of preparation towards the membership and beyond.

Learning from other member-states is required to assist us in formulating a comprehensive roadmap towards the membership in ASEAN. Therefore, we have decided to pay high level visits to every member-state of ASEAN. We have been conducting ASEAN Tour to several member-states already; this tour is directly headed by H.E Prime Minister Gusmão. The tour is not only to learn but to share with the member-states the progress of Timor-Leste's preparation towards ASEAN integration and development processes of Timor-Leste in general.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Timor-Leste is serious about securing a space as an ASEAN member, what is then the reaction from the ASEAN member-states?

The entire member-states of ASEAN have expressed their full support to Timor-Leste's accession to the ASEAN family. In the Chairman's Statement on the 22<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit in Bandar Seri Begawan on 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> April 2013 has clearly stated that the ASEAN member-states were:

*“... encouraged by the progress in discussions of the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC), and the ACC Working Group (ACCWG), on all relevant aspects related to the application by Timor-Leste, as well as its possible implications on ASEAN, and agreed to explore the possibility of Timor-Leste’s participation in ASEAN activities within the context of its need for capacity building”.<sup>3</sup>*

This means that from next year on, Timor-Leste will be given wider and broader space to participate in ASEAN activities. As a result of this decision, my office is working very hard on identifying relevant and important activities that require participation from relevant line ministry and state entities. In the meetings with the members of government, I have made it very clear that it is important for each line ministry to allocate a specific budget for ASEAN activities. The Prime Minister has also made this clear and urged each line ministry to include in their budget for 2014 a specific allocation for ASEAN activities.

We have been working very closely with every line ministries and state entities in the country; these entities have been very cooperative and helpful. We are clear on our mandate to ensure that Timor-Leste is pursuing a unified and coherent approach to joining ASEAN. The Asia Foundation has been very helpful and reliable partner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in these efforts.

I, on this occasion, put forward an alternate view than the sweeping assessment made The Asia Foundation Timor-Leste in the Concept Note for this Round Table Meeting that “ministries in general, but in Timor-Leste specifically, are unable to adequately communicate their mandates and programs outside their ministries”. Much remains to be done, and it is important to recognize our limitations, but it is equally important to note the progress we have made so far in terms of establishing close cooperation and coordination with relevant entities in the continuing effort of bringing Timor-Leste into the ASEAN family.

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<sup>3</sup>Chairman’s Statement of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit, “Our People, Our Future Together, Bandar Seri Begawan, 24-25 April 2013

We want to see our partners that standby us and not discrediting all our concerted efforts being made at every-level to achieve ASEAN membership. Our partners must recognise the incremental development processes in Timor-Leste. No doubt that there are many challenges, but this is the nature of a country that exists only 11 years and that began its development process from scratch.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding this remark, let me emphasise again the importance of various CSOs in assisting ASEAN to realise its dream by 2015 of One Identity, One Vision and One Community. To realise this dream, it is incumbent upon each and every member of communities. ASEAN has recognised the importance of citizen's participation in pursuing this ambition.

Timor-Leste is making its way to ASEAN. CSOs are part and parcel of this process. Therefore, active participation from CSOs is strongly encouraged. CSOs in Timor-Leste are encouraged to broaden their scope of focus and attention- not only focus on internal issues but regional issues specially faced by ASEAN and how those issues beyond our immediate borders affect our domestic issues. We, as government, will continually engage CSOs our efforts. An active citizenry will further enrich public policy discussions.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are serious about becoming a member of the ASEAN family; therefore, we have been working very hard to ensure that Timor-Leste is well-prepared and will not be a burden for ASEAN. As to when Timor-Leste finally becomes the eleventh member of the ASEAN family is dependent on the wisdom of the member-states of ASEAN to take their youngest member to the family.

Thank you all very much for the attention!