



**MONITORIZASAUN HO ADVOKASIA BA SEITOR SIGURANSA  
MONITORIZAÇÃO E ADVOCACIA DO SECTOR DE SEGURANÇA  
MONITORING AND ADVOCACY OF THE SECURITY SECTOR**

**Fundasaun Mahein, 27 May 2022**

**Press Release**

## **Reflections on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Timor-Leste's Restored Independence:**

### **Fundasaun Mahein's call to the historic leaders of RDTL**

During the 20 years since the restoration of our independence, the people and leaders of Timor-Leste have collectively achieved many things, including creating a lasting peace free from major violence, maintaining our neutrality and sovereignty and improving some of our basic infrastructure. Despite these achievements, structural violence in the form of poverty, corruption and impunity continues to harm the lives and wellbeing of many of our people, and delay Timor-Leste's transformation into a prosperous and secure nation. Political impasses and international crises have further exacerbated our internal socio-economic problems. Too many of our people continue to live in sub-standard homes, lacking adequate sanitation, decent income and access to quality education and healthcare, which means that many children of our nation face significant barriers to achieving a comfortable, secure life.

From Fundasaun Mahein's perspective, Timor-Leste is facing combined crises of financial uncertainty, political instability, poor domestic productivity, youth unemployment, internal migration, poor nutrition and health, sub-standard education and literacy, and environmental fragility. While we recognise that these problems are extremely complex and cannot be resolved immediately, failing to take serious action to address them now guarantees that increased economic suffering, horizontal and vertical social conflict and political instability will occur in the future. Not only will this harm the lives and wellbeing of Timor-Leste's population – it directly threatens the security, integrity and sovereignty of our state which so many of our beloved Timorese people died and suffered to make a reality.

While Fundasaun Mahein remains optimistic about Timor-Leste's future, we see that there are major challenges which our leaders must overcome before we can fully realise the promise of independence. Resolving the long-term, structural problems of malnutrition, education, health, sanitation, transport infrastructure, economic development and state capacity requires cooperation between leaders and integrated planning based on actual constraints and possibilities.

We also see that economic development – specifically, industrialisation of agriculture and development of the manufacturing and services sectors – is fundamental to achieving all additional goals. If our people remain poor and our industries and services do not increase in productivity and value, we can never achieve financial sustainability and escape dependency on limited petroleum wealth and international support for technical issues. If we fail to diversify economically and raise our people’s living standards, financial and social crisis will inevitably follow, which will destroy the dream of independence and the legacy of the historic resistance leaders.

Therefore, we need a comprehensive, integrated plan for the structural transformation of our economy, which must be developed in consultation with stakeholders representing labour and industry, as well as technical experts and international advisors. The plan must realistically account for Timor-Leste’s natural resources, physical and non-physical constraints and socio-cultural specificities, and aim to modernise our society and economy while preserving key aspects of our cultural heritage and protecting labour rights and the natural environment. This plan must also include a comprehensive education reform program, including targets for improving maternal and child nutrition, school facilities, teacher quality and higher education curricula. A strong emphasis on mathematics, literacy, engineering, science and languages will prepare our young people for participating in a modern, productive economy.

Such a development plan will increase our self-sufficiency, prosperity and sovereignty, but international cooperation will also continue to be crucial for securing our developmental aims and national prosperity and security. Continued diplomatic relations with regional and global partners, involvement in international initiatives, and security and defence cooperation are therefore essential for ensuring our national security and maintaining friendly relations with a wide variety of international partners. In this way, Timor-Leste can continue to reap the benefits of these partnerships while avoiding taking sides in international competition. By taking these steps, our historic leaders will secure our people’s prosperity, and cement their legacy long into the future.

For more detailed information, please see the full report, or contact Fundasaun Mahein with the below details:

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