**Timor-Leste:**
**regional integration, democracy, prosperity**

**Speech by**
**President J. Ramos-Horta**
**Nobel Peace Laureate (1996)**
**at the "10th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit",**

Excellency Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi,
Excellency Chief Minister of Gujarat,
Shri Bhupendra Rajnikant Patel,
His Royal Highness President of the UAE,
Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan,
Excellency President of Mozambique,
Filipe Jacinto Nyusi,
Excellency Prime Minister of Czech Republic,
Petr Fiala,
Honourable Ministers, Federal and State,
Honourable Members of the National and State Legislatures,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is always a real pleasure to set foot on this land of a great ancient civilization. I first visited India on a personal capacity in April 1992, having spent more than a week in *Dharramsala*.

My first official visit was in 2003 as Foreign Minister of the newly independent Timor-Leste. I visited again in 2013, 2014 and 2015 in different capacities. As Senior Minister for Foreign Affairs of my country, I whole-heartedly supported India's meritful right to be a permanent member of the UN Security Council. And I'm continuing to advocate for India and Indonesia to be permanent members of a reformed, expanded, more representative UNSC.

As Chair in 2014-15 of the High Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations I visited Dheli for extensive consultations with Indian leaders, including senior military officers, and worked closely with the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in NY as we produced a 100 page report and recommendation on how the UN should

anticipate and respond more timely and effectively to the new emerging security challenges.

My sincere appreciation for the invitation to address this prestigious international forum. My gratitude to a great visionary, transformative leader, Prime Minister *Shri Narendra Modi*, who conceived the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in 2003. Gratitude for the warm reception extended to me and the members of my delegation.

This forum, now renowned globally, has been a catalyst for business networking, knowledge sharing and strategic partnerships, inclusive growth and sustainable development.

The state of Gujarat, driven by an inherent entrepreneurial spirit, has emerged as an industrial leader and a favoured destination for investment.

Timor-Leste, for its part, represents an oasis of peace, tolerance and stability, where fundamental rights and freedoms are strictly safeguarded. The international media watch *Reporters Without Borders* rates Timor-Leste number 10 globally out of 193 countries.

Timor-Leste stands out with a business environment conducive to investments, having consolidated global presence, an active member of the United Nations and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), a pioneer of the g7+ fragile states, leader in climate change within the LDCs and SIDS.

We are progressing on our membership process with WTO, hoping to formally accede by March this year. Formal ASEAN membership should occur in 2025.

We are committed to creating a favourable business environment, with legislation in line with international best practices, protecting foreign investments, eliminating double taxation, open to PPPs, BOTs, and any other mutually beneficial modality consistent with the priorities outlined in our National Strategic Development Plan.

We have a Sovereign Wealth Fund with significant investments in US Treasury Bonds and other developed markets and have invested significantly in financial markets with annual returns of over 8%. We have zero debt to commercial banks. Our debt to regional or multilateral lending institutions are 13% of our GDP.

Our young and vibrant diaspora, present in countries such as Australia, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Portugal, the United Kingdom, contributes significantly to the development of both host countries and Timor-Leste, with foreign remittances being an important part of our society well-being.

We invite you to invest with us, be part of the realization of a dream. Opportunities abound. I outline some.

**Tourism sector:**

Almost the entire Northern coast of Timor-Leste, Ataúro and Jaco Islands teem with the richest bio diversity in the world, boasting the healthiest Coral Biodiversity in the entire region, known as the *Amazon of the Seas*. Ataúro Island, located north of Timor-Leste's capital, is recognised as a most important part of the global centre of marine biodiversity and a global priority for conservation. We integrate a region that covers 1.6 per cent of the planet's ocean area, bursting with marine life, home to 76 per cent of all known coral species in the world and habitat of more than 3,000 species of fish.

We are seeking investments and partnership in hotels, resorts, homestays, convention centres, restaurants, services, customer support, wellness and hospitals.

**Oil, gas, minerals, renewables:**

We have vast resources, oil and natural gas reserves, onshore and offshore within our Exclusive Economic Zone, where the Greater Sunrise Gas Field stands out, whose consortium led by *Woodside* is expected to bring this important wealth onshore.

In the coming years, Timor-Leste will invest in the construction of a modern gas pipeline and petrochemical industry as part of our major *Tasi Mane project*. This major national investment includes, among others, the construction of a refinery, the adaptation of our power stations to natural gas and the development of a multifunctional supply base, for all the related needs.

We also have large reserves of other minerals, huge marble structures, limestone, a key resource for the development of cement industries and other construction products, capable of feeding the domestic market and supplying growing foreign demand.

**Green Economy, Renewable Energies:**

Committed to sustainable development, we seek to invest in renewable energy as prudent, incremental transition to renewable energies. We are looking forward to working with the UAE, led by a visionary leader, President *Sheik Mohammed Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan*, with whom we share many commonalities.

This is in line with the commitments made at the recent COP28 Summit held recently in Dubai. I take the opportunity to congratulate His Royal Highness, the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), *Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan*, for the success of UAE Chairmanship of the 28th Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC.

We have great potential for developing solar and wind energy production fields, and some projects are underway with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), namely in the municipality of *Manatuto*, where an initial investment of US$ 120 Million dollars is expected to produce in 25 years overall return above Us$ 300 Million Dollars.

We seek to develop hydroelectrics with the construction of dams and mini-hydroelectric plants that can take advantage of the mountainous terrain and rainy season, guaranteeing access to clean energy and reserve of water for irrigation and urban supply.

**Infrastructure and transport:**

In the last 15 years we have seen dramatic improvements in our infrastructure sector, national roads, electricity covering now over 96% of the country, the state of the art Port of *Tibar* Bay operating since the end of 2022, with a total investment of US$ 280 million dollars. This was a first public-private partnership celebrated between the *Bolloré* Group, World Bank and Government of Timor-Leste. One of the best projects in this sector, it is capable of transforming this port into a hub for connecting people and goods at regional level.

We are also starting the first phase of the expansion of Dili International Airport, with an initial investment of US$ 97,7 million dollars, partially funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the Governments of Australia and Japan. This includes expanding the runway and building a modern terminal. This links up to a wider program facilitating air services with other national and regional airports, combined with an aircraft maintenance network, capable of transforming Timor-Leste into a hub for air connectivity and services.

In connectivity, we are looking forward to the arrival onshore in Dili in 2024 of a submarine cable from Port Hedland, Australia, a project funded by the Australian Government.

**Health:**

The development of the national health system, with the improvement and modernisation of our primary, secondary and tertiary health care network, go hand in hand with investments planned in tourism, infrastructure and different economic activities, responding to the needs of our national and foreign customers. We are looking at building new modern, well-equipped hospitals. In 2002, we had 20 medical doctors for roughly 900,000 people. In 2024, we have over 1,200 medical doctors for 1,400,000 people.

Our ASEAN road map anticipates the construction of suitable infrastructures to host international summits, such as airports and communications facilities, 5 Star Hotels, convention centre and modern health and hospital services.

**Agriculture, fisheries and forestry:**

Timor-Leste has great potential for agricultural development, traditional crops such as rice, coffee, maize, cassava, cocoa, vanilla, etc; and potentially sorghum and other food products adapted to our climate and natural conditions.

We plan to develop projects that can respond to the needs of domestic consumers, enhanced food security and self-sufficiency, in order to reduce excessive dependence on imported products.

We will invest more in the production, processing, distribution and export of meat, fish and seafood, milk and dairy products, with added value that may contribute to reducing malnutrition and poverty.

Investments can also be in the reforestation of areas at risk of natural disasters, planting traditional species (such as sandalwood) or those with great commercial potential such as Mahogany.

Inspired by India, we seek technologically sustainable growth, promoting innovation and the digital economy.

India has highly trained and specialised human resources in the new technologies sector, taking advantage of the different telecommunications infrastructures. You have also been successful in developing highly profitable Digital Economy projects that benefit the entire production value chain. You have linked producers, distributors, retailers and consumers on the one hand and promoting increasingly innovative, creative and competitive products through digital platforms and social online networks, on the other.

We eagerly anticipate the inauguration of the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in New Delhi, India. Simultaneously, we await with great anticipation the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of India in Dili, thereby solidifying the visionary concept put forth by Prime Minister Modi — a call to forge a '*Delhi-Dili axis of progress and development'*.

This axis of progress is set to build upon the robust foundations laid by our shared bilateral and multilateral cooperation. It promises to be a testament to an enduring friendship, echoing the dedicated service of Indian diplomats such as Ambassadors *Kamalesh Sharma and Atul Khare*, who served as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Timor-Leste.

Our gratitude extends to the 7,737 peacekeepers, military and Police, who played pivotal roles over a decade of United Nations missions in Timor-Leste. India, a stalwart contributor to UNTAET, UNMISET, UNOTIL, and UNMIT, played a critical role in fostering stability and security in TL.

India's commitment to assisting Timor-Leste in developing essential human resources, diplomats, and leadership officers as part of its accession process to ASEAN is highly commendable.

Notably, 12 diplomats have recently undergone training at the *Shusma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service*, a demonstration to the fulfilment of this commitment. We hope to expand this partnership in the coming years.

May this summit thrive as a catalyst for fostering fruitful partnerships for global sustainable development and shared prosperity.

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