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THE MDG LECTURES

Timor Leste: Challenges and Opportunities for Ireland as a Partner Country

12 March 2009

Introduction

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am deeply honoured to be here tonight and to speak of Timor Leste: of its current situation; of the relationship between Timor Leste and Ireland, and of the opportunities and challenges for this beautiful, yet fragile new state. Ireland has a long standing relationship with Timor Leste. TCD has offered a course in Timorese law for many years. William Binchy has produced a very fine, authoritative and useful book about it. Our journalists recognised the significance of what was happening in Timor from early days. Many ordinary people who walk our streets know about Timor, and about the man called Tom Hyland who was a Dublin bus driver and who has worked hard for so many years for Timor, and who now lives and works there. Many people know someone who has worked in Timor or who has worked there themselves. It is an extraordinary connection between two countries, which in so many ways are so far away from each other, yet between which there is such a connection.

First let me say a word or two about Timor. It is a very small but very beautiful country, with a land mass of some 15,000 square kilometres, which includes mountains, jungle and beautiful beaches and a magnificent shore line. It has a population of approximately 1m. I must interject a note of caution on all the statistics which I use in this lecture, because, although they are sourced from

reputable organisations such as the UN and the World Bank, there are significant difficulties in collecting accurate data across the country. Timor Leste was occupied by the Portuguese for some 400 years, until November 1975, when it was declared independent. However it was invaded by Indonesia in December 1975 and subjected to a military occupation until 1999. There was consistent resistance to the occupation by the Timorese, and in the 25 years of Indonesian occupation it is estimated that a quarter of the population (some 200,000 people) died of the consequences of repression, forced resettlement and famine. In 1999 following a Popular Consultation, in which the people overwhelmingly declared their desire for independence, Indonesia agreed to withdraw. This was followed by a terribly violent Indonesian withdrawal which led to hundreds of deaths, to whole towns being reduced to ruins and to the displacement of 50% of the population. For Timor it was a time of terror and trauma. It all happened just ten years ago.

A recent report by the Timorese and Indonesian Truth and Friendship Commission, *Per Memoriam ad Spem*, published less than a year ago, tells a graphic tale of what happened prior to and immediately following the Popular Consultation on 30 August 1999 . It tells of *“gross human rights violations, including murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture, illegal detention and forcible transfer and deportation carried out against the civilian population”*. Although both those pro-independence and those who supported Indonesia were involved in the atrocities, the Commission found that the great majority of reported violations were perpetrated against pro-independence supporters. The Commission found that Indonesian *“personnel, police and civilian authorities consistently and systematically co-operated with and supported the militia in a number of significant ways that contributed to the perpetration of the crimes...”* and that they sometimes participated in the operations that led to these crimes. *Their headquarters were used as facilities for illegal detentions and torture and sexual violence “*

The Commission also found that government of Timor Leste “*bears responsibility for the gross human rights violations perpetrated by pro-independence groups against those opposed to independence.*” This Truth and Friendship Commission was the first bi-lateral Commission in the world. It based its mandate on restorative justice rather than retributive justice. It stated “*The present generation owes the future generation to mend all broken relationships and lay a strong foundation for a future that shines and is full of hope.* “

What this report articulates is the complexity of the situations which lead to independence – the dividing of families, brother set against brother, father betrayed by son. I think there are those in Ireland who remember such divisions in the early days of Ireland’s and in the more recent northern Troubles.

And of course it was not only about torture and murder, it was also about the destruction of the infrastructure of the country. It is very shocking to travel through Timor and to see the rows of houses burned as the Indonesians left to prevent the Timorese occupying them, which have never been occupied because people fear that the former owner will return; to see huge areas of agricultural land lying unused for the same reason; to see the plant which was planted to make the land unusable, which is poisonous, which prevents other plants from growing, and which spreads rapidly. The consequence of this is that there is an inability to use much land to grow food in a country in which 50% of the people live on less than \$0.88 a day. Many, many government buildings were destroyed and those who worked in them left Timor Leste, resulting in the loss both of the facility and of the function. In addition to this much of the physical infrastructure in terms of roads and bridges was damaged and destroyed.

The level of trauma created by all this cannot be under-estimated. The people have lived in, and with, fear for so many years. They have been isolated and damaged by the loss of infrastructure, of educational opportunity, and of the opportunity to acquire skills and competences, and to get access to employment

The first ophthalmologist in Timor graduated a few months ago. The first physiotherapists are being trained by the Cambodia Trust which is run by an Irish man. There is such a lack of professionals – medical, engineering, legal, architectural etc. We took one 80km drive across the island which took us 7 hours! There is very little communication across the island.

There are not many of us who have any memory of the British leaving Ireland all those years ago, but can you imagine what it would have been like had they destroyed the roads and bridges, burned towns, destroyed schools and hospitals, wrecked the civil administration and contaminated much of the agricultural land. It has made the process of constructing a new state so much more difficult. Can you imagine too had we been left without a common language, but speaking only a variety of dialects? Timor faces, as well, so many of the other challenges faced by all countries emerging from long colonisation and oppression into independence.

After the Indonesian withdrawal there were three years of United Nations peacekeeping until 2002, (Ireland was part of that peacekeeping force) when Timor became an independent state, Even after 2002, as the young state struggled, with international assistance, to establish itself, there were more difficulties. In 2006, sparked by the dismissal of nearly one third of the army, some 600 soldiers, the tensions culminated in fierce factional fighting which resulted in more than 100,000 people being displaced. In 2008 there was a gun attack in which President Ramos Horta was seriously injured, and there was also an attack on the Prime Minister. With a United Nations presence in the form of UNMIT and an International Stabilisation Force from Australia and New Zealand, the last years have been years of huge difficulty for this proud nation, but the most recent Report of the UN Secretary General records that huge progress is being made.

These years of trial for Timor Leste correspond almost exactly with the years of the Northern Ireland troubles. Northern Ireland has acknowledged the fragility of its situation. We are now mourning the deaths of three more men, brutally murdered by dissident paramilitaries. But we have learned a lot about the processes and pitfalls of peacemaking, and we do have things to share as a product of our hard won peace. This is what Ireland is seeking to do through the work of the DFA's Conflict Resolution Unit, the activities of which complement the existing Irish Aid programme in Timor Leste.

This lecture is, of course, being delivered under the sponsorship of Irish Aid and in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. When it was established as a state in 2002 Timor Leste committed to attaining the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. They are very challenging targets for all who are working towards them, and the British International Development Secretary stated on Monday that the " financial tsunami" sweeping across the world could push progress on the MDGs back by up to three years. Research from Dfid indicates that a further 90 million people will be pushed into poverty by 2010.

The Millennium Development Goals are hugely relevant to Timor Leste. Perhaps I could briefly remind you of the eight goals and tell you what the current state of play is for Timor.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – neither target is been achieved for this goal. The incidence of poverty has risen from 36% in 2001 to 50% in 2008.

Goal Two: Achieve Universal Primary Education: the levels of participation in all forms of education are increasing, despite the increasing poverty levels: 35% of children are now enrolling in primary education.

Goal Three: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women: Timor Leste is prioritising achievement of this goal and the eradication of poverty. I will talk more

about this later, but in a country in which women play a very subservient role generally, 28% of the Members of Parliament are women.

Goal Four: Reduce Child Mortality; progress is being made here with infant mortality indicated as reducing to 68/1,000 births (Ireland is estimated to have 5.14 deaths per thousand. So, much remains to be done.

Goal Five: Improve Maternal Health and reduce the maternal mortality rate: The maternal mortality rate in Ireland is among the best in the world at 2 per 100,000. In Timor it is 660 per 100,000.

Goal Six: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria & Other Diseases – we do not know the situation here as here is insufficient data available, but 10.7% of deaths were attributed to malaria in 2007. There is a high prevalence of Tuberculosis (98 per 100,000 deaths in 2007) and there are 56 known cases of HIV Aids. However it is to be expected that there is gross under-reporting of the incidence of this condition, giving the lack of availability of testing facilities.

Goal Seven: Ensure Environmental Sustainability: this goal involves the realisation of targets relating to access to water and basic sanitation; This is a very difficult target for Timor Leste: about 90% of the population use wood for fuel and there is mass deforestation as a consequence. In terms of water most people walk a mile to get water, but in large areas there is three mile walk for water. Just think about it – the walk, carrying the water (it is very heavy), and each drop of it is precious. I remember living in Kenya, with a five minute walk to the water source – it made you hugely careful about how you used water.

Goal Eight: Develop a Global Partnership for Development: as can be seen there are massive problems to be dealt with in Timor, but aid has increased to \$210m in 2006. The important thing about much of this aid is that it is not money which comes into Timor: rather it goes back to the donor countries in the form of salaries, wages, and the travel and living expenses of expatriate staff. Ireland's

contribution has been massive: e 25.17m over 2003-2008, and most of this money has used for capacity building in Timor in projects such as governance, justice and human rights, employment creation, the promotion of gender equality and strengthening civil society. It is a significant contribution from a small country.

The Timorese Government is working to realise the MDGs, inter alia, through the ***National Development Plan*** which seeks to achieve a situation in which, by the year 2020:

- East Timor will be a democratic country with a vibrant traditional culture and a sustainable environment;
- It will be a prosperous society with adequate food, shelter and clothing for all people;
- Communities will live in safety, with no discrimination;
- People will be literate, knowledgeable and skilled. They will be healthy, and live a long, productive life. They will actively participate in economic, social and political development, promoting social equality and national unity;
- People will no longer be isolated, because there will be good roads, transport, electricity, and communications in the towns and villages, in all regions of the country;
- Production and employment will increase in all sectors - agriculture, fisheries and forestry;
- Living standards and services will improve for all East Timorese, and income will be fairly distributed;
- Prices will be stable, and food supplies secure, based on sound management and sustainable utilization of natural resources;
- The economy and finances of the state will be managed efficiently, transparently, and will be free from corruption; and

- The state will be based on the rule of law. Government, private sector, civil society and community leaders will be fully responsible to those by whom they were chosen or elected.

So apart from the issues which I have already highlighted, what are the principle challenges for Timor Leste? They reflect the priorities which Government has identified in the National Development Plan.

Governance and Communication

Nobody really seems to know how many languages are spoken in Timor Leste among the population of 1m. Some suggest up to 39 languages .We know that: Tetum and Portuguese are the official languages. Indonesian and English are also spoken. There are sometime said to be about 16 indigenous languages; Tetum, Galole, Mambae, and Kemak are spoken by significant numbers of people. Probably fewer than 10% of the population has access to mobile phones, there is no general telephone infrastructure, there is a telecommunications monopoly which results in massively high telecommunication costs. Probably between 25% and 30% of the population have access to a radio. There is virtually no television. Roads and bridges are very poor and travel is difficult. All these factors contribute to a sense of isolation, which, combined with the ongoing security difficulties, lead to widespread lack of knowledge about what is actually happening. One of the questions we asked on our early fact-finding visit, of every group which we met, was “ what is your greatest concern”. Their greatest concern, despite the poverty, hunger, malnutrition and lack of access to water was security. Enhanced communication options would ease a lot of this concern and counteract the myths which are the inevitable result of unreliable and inaccessible communication methods.

Another complication of the linguistic variations is to be found in the language of governance, and particularly the language of the criminal justice sector. Only

some 5% of the population speaks Portuguese, yet this is the language of the criminal justice system. All the superior courts operate using Portuguese, although there may be some Tetum translation (but we would all be aware of the hazards of translation in legal matters. I will never forget the French to English translator at the European Court of Justice who translated the word for “claim” as “pretend” – crucial error, as I puzzled about why the applicant was pretending that something had happened rather than as I eventually realized, claiming!

The development of modern policing, justice and security mechanisms

One of the direct consequences of the fight for independence is the unresolved relationship between the police and the army, and the need to find a peacetime role for the army. After police officers were murdered by soldiers in 2006, the United Nations moved back to Timor bringing a United Nations Police Force. It comprises officers from 43 different countries, from Pakistan to Zimbabwe, from New Zealand to India. The difficulties of providing the UN with formed police units means that different cultures and operational methods of all these individual police forces, which have been responsible for mentoring, have not been conducive to the development of a single modern Timorese policing culture. The Government of Timor Leste and the United Nations MIT are involved in a Security Sector Review, and our advice has been sought on several occasions as a consequence of the lessons learned both from Northern Ireland and from the development of the modern Irish Army with its distinctive peace-keeping role. Ireland is assisting the Security Sector Review, and we are also exploring how we might support the involvement of civil society in the process of security sector review. We have also provided training for Timorese army officers in Ireland.

In addition to this there are very few Timorese lawyers, virtually no judges and very few criminal justice administrators. This is all work in progress. Yet functioning systems for justice and security are vital to the development of democratic governance.

Economic Development

In Northern Ireland economic development went hand in hand with peace-making and societal stabilisation. Timor Leste has oil revenues which it is finally able to exploit, but it recognises that it is imperative that those resources do not become the source of further instability as happened in other developing countries. If handled correctly the oil revenues can be a major support for the transitions from poverty.

The economic base is largely subsistence agriculture and most products used, even food, are imported. There is a very weak entrepreneurial base, and widespread unemployment. The population is rising rapidly, and there are estimated to be 20,000 people coming into the workforce every year. There are no jobs for them. There are martial arts gangs which were a significant problem in terms of drugs etc, but which now seem to be developing a rather more positive function.

Strengths and opportunities

Timor has many strengths – it has a functioning parliamentary democracy, which has the broad support of the public. It has strong leadership by President Jose Ramos Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao. It has a strong opposition leader in Mari Alkatiri, all of whom have a genuine commitment to the betterment of the country, public credibility, well honed political skills and a notable lack of interest in accruing personal wealth. It has an emerging civil service, a small but talented middle class which is committed to values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, there is a very obvious determination to create a viable and internationally well regarded state. It has in some ways a strong and effective civil society, and a strong commitment to education, though few facilities. It has a strong functioning church – 98% of the population are Catholic and representatives of the church have played many roles over the years. I think, for

example of the young priest who played his part in persuading rebels to come down from the jungle in 2008 after the shooting of the president. This was achieved without any further loss of life, and this one priest was very important in the process. I think too of the contribution of the church in terms of what health facilities there are, and in terms too, of education. Bishop Belo of Timor Leste was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize together with President Ramos Horta in 2002, for their leadership towards a peaceful democracy. I think also of one of the saddest churches I have visited, which is in Suai, where in 1999 hundreds of people took refuge in the church to escape the withdrawing Indonesians. The three priests were shot dead as they pleaded with the attackers to leave the people alone, and the church was set on fire with the people barricaded inside. Other people took refuge in the upper structure of a new church which was being built on the site. They were hurled to their death. Nobody really seems to know how many people died because so many people simply disappeared.

There is hugely strong support from the international community through the United Nations and through bi-lateral relationships such as those with Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and relationships with Indonesia are developing. Ireland too is playing its role across many projects.

There are very low levels of reported crime and a very low apparent incidence of crime generally, apart from the issue of domestic and gender based violence, which is endemic and a major problem.

Finally, and of great importance, is the fact that the Timorese people, despite all that has happened, have a great culture of innate courtesy and of trying to solve problems through their very local structures, the *sucos*. Their courtesy has been evident to me during many meetings as I have watched them allow each other to speak, never interrupting, but waiting courteously until the speaker has finished what he wants to say, before, on occasion, contradicting them roundly and offering a very different analysis. This process of sitting round and talking

problems through seems to very natural and a normal part of their every day lives. It is very reminiscent of the best of restorative justice ideas. However it does not always work – obviously there will be those who will abuse such systems, and we know that women who have suffered violence do not get redress through such systems, rather the usual outcome is that a pig is giving by the husband perpetrator to the father of the woman and the violence very often continues. It does seem to me however that these processes which are so much part of Timorese culture offer huge opportunities in a country in which the formal justice system is largely inaccessible.

In the few minutes left to me I would like to contemplate some of the major challenges for Timor Leste in the days ahead. The priorities set in the National Development Plan are clear, and they will be facilitated by the effective use of the UN support which is currently committed until 2012, by the continuing good bi-lateral relations with so many donor countries, and by the utilisation of the oil revenues to deal with structural deficits, thereby creating employment and opportunities for local entrepreneurship.

Economic development will only occur in the context of the proper establishment of the rule of law and of active and effective governance processes together with accountability and respect for human rights. A huge amount remains to be done in this context. Timor Leste is also struggling to deal with its past, and the Truth and friendship Commission Report to which I referred earlier is one part of this work. In addition to this Ireland is supporting the Programme for Peace, Remembrance and Reconciliation, which involves capacity building in the Peace centre at the National University, the technical secretariat which is dealing with the outcomes of an earlier Commission of Truth, Reception and Reconciliation, supporting a local NGO which is offering trauma counselling to this nation, which has many obviously traumatised citizens after the decades of violence, and a video archive of the past.

Ireland is also funding high level dialogue to facilitate even better relationships between those responsible for governance and is engaged through a consortium of local NGOs and the University of Columbia in New York in the development of an Early Warning and Response System in Timor Leste. This will provide early warning of emerging difficulties in local areas, whether in relationships with the police, or sustainability of the water supply or all the other potential indicators of threat to stability. The information will be collected on a monthly basis across the whole territory of Timor Leste and will be communicated to the appropriate arm of government to enable an early response to prevent trouble developing. This is a very exciting project which has great potential, as it has the support of the Secretary of State for Security who will bring together civil society and government to facilitate the process. It is based on international best practice in Early Warning and Response tailored to the situation in Timor Leste. Ireland is engaged in many other ways with the Government of Timor Leste, and we are always warmly received by the President, Prime Minister etc.

Role of Women

Before I conclude, I wish to say a few words about the role of women in conflict. Ten years ago, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It recognised the particular impact of war on women, sought ways to ameliorate this and, importantly, to encourage the leadership role of women in peace making and peace building. From the Northern Ireland experience, we know the impact that women can make in articulating the case for peace. And I am aware from my talks with officials of the immensely valuable role that the Women's Coalition played in the Good Friday Agreement negotiations.

My role as Special Envoy to Timor-Leste has been expanded to include acting as Special Envoy for UN Security Council Resolution 1325. This is an immensely exciting project. Key elements include the development of an Irish National Action Plan and advocacy with multilateral organisations, including the United

Nations. A new and innovative feature, inspired by former President Mary Robinson, has been the creation of a 'cross-learning' exercise involving groups from Northern Ireland, Timor-Leste and Liberia. This is designed to act as a catalyst for sharing ideas between the different regions on how best to promote the objectives of Resolution 1325 based on the direct experience of post-conflict countries.

I look forward to working on this project as a tangible contribution towards the implementation of Resolution 1325, and also to go some way towards achieving Goal Three of the Millennium Development Goals, which seeks to promote gender equality and empower women.

Conclusion

Timor Leste has travelled a long and difficult road over the past decades. There has been unimaginable suffering, which has been largely ignored by the world. I think of our journey on the road from Dili to Suai, across the island, and of the moment when we stopped high in the mountains, beside a great crucifix. We all got out and were taken to the edge of a great cliff from which we looked down in wonder, hundreds of feet, across magnificent territory. And we were told that on many occasions during the Indonesian occupation people were taken from their homes, and did not return. When their families asked where they had gone, they were told that they had gone to Jakarta 2. After the withdrawal the people were able to move more freely and they found the cliff, and realised that this was the place to which those people had been brought by the Indonesians, and thrown over the edge to certain death. This was Jakarta 2. It was a chilling moment as we stood where so many people had stood, knowing that they were facing certain and immediate death. The presence of the crucifix marking the spot was a stark symbol of the suffering of this place.

It has been a huge privilege for me to come to know the people of Timor and to work, however inadequately, with the Irish Government and with so many people,

Timorese, Irish, and of other nationalities who are working together to assist the Timorese Government in realising its National Development Plan, and in making of this beautiful country a vibrant, healthy nation capable of playing its full role in the world.

Dame Nuala O'Loan

12 November 2009