

Dear Friends of Timor-Leste,

As you gather in Dublin to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Popular Consultation I would like to send you these brief words of encouragement to continue to give solidarity to Timor-Leste.

To Sean and Oran, well done for being on the ground here during that time. You did the campaign proud.

What was achieved 10 years ago was nothing short of a miracle. It is worth remembering that 98% of the population turned out to vote despite the intimidation. The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of independence, as we all knew it would be. People came down from every hamlet and village in order to cast their ballot. They had waited a long time.

I think we all knew that it was not going to be easy but that this was going to be the only opportunity for the Timorese to rid themselves of some uninvited guests. Sadly, many Timorese paid the ultimate price in order that the nation become independent. The freedom that we all enjoy in Timor today is because these brave people were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice.

10 years ago we did not sit idly by and watch events. We took to the streets. But we took to the streets across the world. Ordinary people would not allow the unthinkable to happen. People would not allow an extraordinarily brave people to be abandoned by leaders who exercise great power. This was evidenced by the support of the Irish government and the fact that the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern phoned Bill Clinton and asked for an international intervention.

Trocaire led the solidarity vigils in Dublin across the country. The words of Poet Laureate, Seamus Heaney echoed across Dublin when he gave his solidarity to the people of Timor.

To all who gave their solidarity to Timor over the years, a very heartfelt thank you. From Irish Aid we have had three committed people, Fionnuala Gilson, Carol Hannon and our Chuck Lathrop, only recently departed from Dili.

Finally, although Timor-Leste remains the poorest country in Asia, much has been achieved since 1999. The presence of Irish Aid of Concern, Progressio, Trocaire and many Irish people on the ground in Timor is a continuing reminder of the very deep solidarity of the Irish government and people to the people of Timor-Leste.

Best wishes  
Tom Hyland

Dili

Timor-Leste

