

**TRÓCAIRE, IN COLLABORATION WITH PROGRESSIO IRELAND AND THE
EAST TIMOR–IRELAND SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN**

“Timor-Leste 10 years on: Ireland’s Role and Impact”

Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre, O’Connell St., Dublin

Dame Nuala O’Loan, Ireland’s Special Envoy to Timor Leste

25 August 2009

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. I am very pleased to be here with you to mark and to celebrate this important occasion – ten years ago on 30 August 1999 the Popular Consultation which led to Timorese independence was held. It was a very hard and dangerous time for the people of Timor-Leste. There may be those of you here tonight who were in Timor-Leste at that time or in the months that followed. I was not but I have read of and heard of it and I have felt as if I was walking the paths of Timor-Leste at that time so clear and graphic are the accounts. Ten years on Timor-Leste is a different country – young and struggling, still much in need of help, but proud and determined to take its rightful place in the world.

First let me say a word or two about Timor-Leste. 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 1.1m. It sits at the meeting of the Pacific and Indian Oceans north of Australia, on the migration route of the great blue whales. Timor-Leste was occupied by the Portugese 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 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 the 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-Leste it was a time of terror and trauma. It all happened just ten years ago.

“Per Memoriam ad Spem,” the report by the Timor-Leste and Indonesian Truth and Friendship Commission, published last year, tells a graphic tale of what happened prior to and immediately following the Popular Consultation on 30 August 1999 which we celebrate today. There were “*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*”. The great majority of this horror was perpetrated against those who wanted independence. 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 “

But 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. Basing 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. “ For me there is an echo here that sounds when I think of Northern Ireland.

During the occupation children were taken away by the Indonesians. The Red Cross are still trying to find some of these lost children and return them to their families. A recent BBC report told of how “thousands of children were taken from East Timor during Indonesia’s occupation. Some were formally adopted, others simply smuggled out in shipping crates at the end of a posting – like illicit souvenirs.” Such tragedy. I have visited the scenes of multiple murders where people took refuge in churches, which were set on fire so that huge numbers died.

And of course it was not only about torture, abduction and murder. It was also about the destruction of the infrastructure of the country. It is very shocking to travel through Timor-Leste and to see the rows of houses burned as the Indonesians left, to prevent the Timorese occupying them: houses 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 many of those who worked in them left Timor-Leste, resulting in the loss both of the facility and of the function. 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

Ireland has been there trying to help the people of Timor-Leste through all this since the 1970s. During the 1990s Trócaire worked hard to ensure that Timor-Leste-Leste remained on the international agenda, and that action was taken by the United Nations. In 1996 Trócaire, along with others, called on the European Union to stop selling arms to the Indonesian Government. The East Timor - Ireland Solidarity Campaign was established in 1992 by Tom Hyland, an unemployed Dublin bus driver in his little house in Ballyfermot. Justin Kilcullen was at the first meeting. There are probably others here tonight who were there and who know Tom. He has worked tirelessly for Timor-Leste and now lives there, working still for the benefit of the people of Timor-Leste. Trócaire and the East Timor-Ireland Solidarity Group held demonstrations and lobbied the Irish Government, organized petitions, mobilised people and politicians to highlight the injustice taking place. Bishop Kirby visited Timor-Leste in July 1999 and, on his return, spoke publicly about the Rwandan genocide and told the Irish people that the East Timorese were facing the same destiny if the international community didn't step in. He called for a UN peace-keeping force to be sent to Timor-Leste to prevent genocide before the referendum was held.

On Sept 11 1999, an international day of solidarity with East Timor, Trócaire and the East Timor Ireland Solidarity Group organised a rally in Dublin. Ireland's march was carried across international news channels, calling on the UN and the international community to intervene and protect the East Timorese.

Trócaire lobbied the Irish government on the UN Genocide Convention and when the Irish delegation went to the European Union, Ireland succeeded in having the EU issue a much stronger resolution regarding East Timor than had been anticipated.

After the Indonesian withdrawal there were three years of United Nations peacekeeping until 2002, when Timor-Leste became an independent state,

Ireland was part of that peacekeeping force deploying her troops in three successive UN peace-keeping missions in Timor-Leste. Ireland also provided observation missions for the 1999 Popular Consultation and in the elections which followed independence. It was a great commitment by all those involved in working for Timor-Leste in Ireland, at a time when Ireland had its own difficulties and struggles.

Even after 2002, as the young state struggled, with international assistance, to establish itself, there were more difficulties culminating, in 2006, in fierce fighting which resulted in more than 100,000 people being displaced, and the dismissal of nearly one third of the army – some 600 soldiers. The United Nations returned to keep the peace. 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.

Since 2002, when Timor-Leste became a fully independent state, Ireland has funded a number of organisations working in Timor-Leste. They include Trocaire, Concern, Caritas, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Interpeace, the UNDP, the World Food programme, and the ICRC.

Over the years Trócaire has worked closely with partners on the ground, to help local people acquire the skills and competences necessary to develop and govern their country, and to address critical issues such as rural poverty and food insecurity (remember that 50% of the population live on US80c a day), to help Communities are being helped to create farming cooperatives, and gain access to markets, as well as to use innovative techniques such as permaculture to improve their ability to feed themselves. Training for women's groups is helping them acquire new skills so that they can earn a living. Trocaire is providing

support to local government and communities to reduce their risk of disasters, such as flooding, and food and water scarcity Trócaire is also supporting a local Land Network, to address critical issues of land rights, which are at the root of many conflicts after the years of occupation and repeated population disturbance.

Timor Leste has been a programme country for Irish Aid since 2003 and, as well as the help provided by NGOs, the Irish Government is providing long term development assistance to generate employment, to reform administration and local government, to strengthen gender equality, access to justice and human rights. Ireland is also working to address some of the roots of conflict and tensions in Timor-Leste, to ensure that the future of the country is more stable than its past. Peace-building requires many different strands and strategies. To prevent the exacerbation of tension by rumour and mistrust it is very important to try and address the myths, and Ireland is funding Radio Timor-Leste Kmanek to broadcast programmes about critical issues across the country. We are also funding a very important project run by a local NGO Belun in conjunction with Columbia University New York which has established an Early Warning, Early Response system in all 13 districts of Timor-Leste. This is very sensitive work – to do it local people need to collect information about things likely to give rise to serious conflict in an area, and convey information to government departments to enable them to intervene to prevent conflict developing in those areas. This has to be done in a very professional manner because the Timorese have experienced terrible savagery over the years and people might well be suspicious of those who gather information for government, but it is very important work because, in a country with limited resources and massive challenges, it will enable the prioritisation of government actions to keep the peace.

We are also supporting, through Trocaire, the Programme for Peace Remembrance and Reconciliation as part of the overall attempt to ensure that

Timor-Leste has strong foundations upon which to build. It involves assistance to an NGO providing psychological support and assistance to deal with trauma, and with the ongoing very high levels of gender based violence; recording and keeping the archives of all the material produced for the first truth commission. With another partner La'o Hamutuk Trocaire is providing critical research and analysis on development issues in Timor-Leste, which is used by both Timor-Leste and the international community.

The ten years which followed the Popular Consultation have been turbulent. There is so much yet to be done

In May 2008 when I made my first visit to Timor-Leste I was immediately struck by the sheer physical beauty of the country, by its gentle people and by the extent of its suffering and the destruction which it had endured. We took one 80km drive across the island, which took us 7 hours!

In 2008 UNPOL were doing the policing, and an Australian International Stabilisation Force was providing security. There were still at least 10,000 internally displaced people. There were some 600 former soldiers, who had been dismissed from the army following the trouble in 2006, calling themselves the petitioners, who represented a serious threat to the stability of the country. Martial arts gangs constituted a serious threat to public safety. There had been the attempt to assassinate the President, and he had been very seriously injured. I met him on that visit – he still looked terribly weak. We travelled across the country, and encountered great fear that Timor-Leste would again disintegrate into violence. Women whose children were clearly terribly hungry, and who had concerns about the security of food supplies, were more afraid of a return to violence than anything else. Buildings which had been burned in 1998 were still charred heaps of bricks. There were widows and veterans who had no source of income. There is still very little communication or transport across the island

I was there in the autumn of 2008, and then I went back in May this year. I was astonished by the extent of change and development. The IDPs had nearly all been resettled following a planned programme. Arrangements had been made to settle the issues concerning the petitioners. Pensions for veterans and widows had been created. Work was in progress with the martial arts gangs. Building work was underway, and the seafront had been developed for leisure purposes. There was clear evidence of developing economic activity. So much change. So much hope, and so much still to be done.

I was at the United Nations in February last for the UN Security Council debate on Timor-Leste. It was very good to see President Jose Ramos Horta, from whom we have heard tonight, speak there, reporting the progress made.

The President acknowledged the wide-ranging ongoing difficulties— there was a major problem of food security in 2008 when imported food became dramatically more expensive. Timor-Leste cannot feed its people, but it is working hard to improve its agriculture. Security remains a major concern. We visited the Vulnerable Persons Unit of the Dili Police on our last visit. The officers there who deal with sexual assaults, child abuse, rape and similar crimes have no powers to make arrests, no cameras to photograph the injuries, no access to DNA or blood testing to identify perpetrators, no safe place to put witnesses, etc etc. Their furniture and equipment consisted of a desk, a computer and a filing cabinet all provided by expatriates. Yet the officers are very keen to do their job. We have provided them with some more equipment but it is tough for them and it means that there is very little redress for sexual crimes.

The thing which strikes one most though, is the speed of the journey on which the people of Timor-Leste are travelling. Progress is rapid, and whilst Timor-Leste has its own assets in terms of oil and minerals, it has had no capacity in its own right to realise those assets. But that is now happening and it seems to me that what the country needs most at the moment is assistance in maintaining the

peace, and in building skills and competences – the first ophthalmologist qualified this year, there is one Timorese engineer, there are few doctors or nurses – 38% of women give birth without any medical assistance and a woman in Timor is 330 times more likely to die giving birth than a woman in Ireland. A child in Timor is 13 times more likely to die in its first year than a child in Ireland.

Timor is beginning to give back to the world too. Ireland is currently running a Cross-learning Project focussed on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security, for women from Timor, Liberia and Northern Ireland who are sharing their experiences in conflict and coming out of conflict, and identifying the strategies and actions which enabled change and progress. We are at the third stage of this project and the women are hugely energised by their participation and by the process of identifying what really worked for them, of learning from one another, and of growing further their own skills and competences. This is work in progress and the women of Timor Leste are taking an equal part with the women and Liberia and of Northern Ireland. The findings of this project will, we hope be reported at the United Nations in New York for the 10th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325.

To summarise over the years Ireland has, working very much with the people of Timor-Leste, through its funding and lobbying, among other things,

1. supplied food, shelter and medicine to displaced and vulnerable communities;
2. provided emergency nutrition programmes;
3. campaigned for international support for Timor–Leste both at the United Nations and the European Union;
4. provided peace-keeping troops for three UN missions to Timor;
5. worked closely with partners on the ground, to build local capacity and to address critical issues;

6. given support to communities to create farming cooperatives, to gain access to markets and to use innovative techniques such as permaculture to improve their ability to feed themselves;
7. trained women's groups in new skills to help them earn a living;
8. helped local government and communities to reduce their vulnerability to disasters;
9. supported a local Land Network, to address critical issues of land rights, which are at the root of many conflicts and critical for the development of the country;
10. provided information and counselling to deal with trauma issues;
11. facilitated communities' access to relevant and accurate information so that tensions are not exacerbated by rumour and mistrust;
12. supported the P-CAVR institution, in the areas of justice, remembrance and reconciliation to ensure that the comprehensive process to document human rights abuses from 1974 – 1999 is not forgotten and that action is taken. This is the most significant and legitimate process for justice seeking that has been undertaken;
13. funded Lao Hamutuk to operate perhaps the most authoritative website on development in Timor-Leste and make a huge contribution through monitoring development issues and providing input and advocacy as new policies are developed in Timor-Leste;
14. Provided organisational support for Timor's first human rights organisation which has spoken out courageously since the Indonesian occupation;
15. funded Radio Timor Kmanek to broadcasting radio programmes about critical issues across the country.;
16. Funded the national NGO Forum (FONGTIL) which is a key voice for civil society in Timor-Leste;
17. Provided funding to support local groups in rural areas to access IT;
18. Supported women calling for justice for domestic and gender based violence as well as the political violence which they experienced during the Indonesian occupation;

19. supported security sector review and reform;
20. funded an early warning, early response system;
21. provided schools, community meeting places, latrines;
22. funded the Provedor – the state’s Human Rights Commission;
23. supported Timorese elections.

There is now even a Tour de Timor cycle race funded by Ireland’s Denis O’Brien!

As I come to the end of this speech I would like to thank all those who contributed to Ireland’s work in Timor, whether through money, or by going there to work. As you will have gathered, there is still work to be done. Resources are still needed.

As the President said in New York, in February this year,

“Nation building and peace-building require vision and long-term steady commitment. This is true in my country and it is equally true in Haiti, Palestine, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Congo. The list is a very long one. The challenges are always overwhelming and might discourage the weak and the impatient. Only the few who dare to dream and to act on their dreams of an ideal abode for all human beings will see the fruits of their dream.”

I wish to pay tribute tonight to President Jose Ramos Horta. He has worked tirelessly garnering support for the people of Timor in its fight for independence, and thereafter. He has been a regular visitor to Ireland, and we meet him every time we visit Timor Leste. Over the years he traveled the world seeking support, in very difficult and straightened circumstances. When I was in Iceland recently, I met a former government minister who told me how, in her student days in the 80s she had shared a flat, and her flat mate had asked her one day if a visitor who was seeking support for his country could come and sleep on their floor for a

few days whilst he pleaded his cause. That man was Jose Ramos Horta. In 1996, together with Bishop Belo of Dili, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Today he is the President of Timor-Leste.

Let us congratulate the President, Government and people of Timor-Leste on their dream and on their tremendous achievements over the past ten years. Let us wish them peace and prosperity in the future.

Thank you,

Dame Nuala O'Loan

25 August 2009