



Keynote Remarks

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“What We Have Learned and How it Links to Actual Successful Transitions”

Supporting Core Government Functions to Address Fragility and Sustain Peace

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all please accept my apologies for not being present in person at this important event. My absence is a result of the ongoing representation of Timor-Leste in the fight to defend the rights and interests of the people of my young Nation against the greed of the so-called multinational companies, whose only purpose is to plunder as much as possible from small, weak and fragile countries, as is our case.

This said, I would like to thank the organizer (Blavatnik School of Government, LSE Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development and the UNDP) for organizing such a useful conversation on the issue that we grapple with on a daily basis.

Over the course of past one and half days, we have benefitted a lot from the insights shared by the distinguished guests, and in particular officials from my fellow g7+ countries.

I'm here also to share with you the insights of fragile, in or post-conflict countries, called g7+, ranging from Africa to Caribbean, from Middle East to Pacific.

The g7+ is a voluntary association of 20 countries that are or have been affected by conflict and/or are now in transition to the next stage of development. The main objective of the g7+ is to share experiences and learn from one another, and to advocate for reforms to the way the international community engages in conflict-affected states.

The g7+ was formed to work in concert with international actors, the private sector, civil society, the media and the people across countries, borders and regions to reform and reinvent a new paradigm for international engagement.

The goal of the g7+ is to stop conflict, build nations and eradicate poverty through innovative development strategies, harmonized to the country context, aligned to the national agenda and led by the States and its People.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

As a citizen of a post-conflict country, Timor-Leste, where I was born and raised under a colony, lived with struggles to get rid of occupation and now trying to consolidate our territorial boundaries; I would like to share some insights and perspectives of what it looks like to live and lead a country that goes through such transition.

This is just an example from one country; but as group of 20 countries, we have had similar fate. That is the reason we have come together in solidarity, as we feel each other's situation better.

Timor-Leste is a young country and consequently its State is considered fragile. There are many challenges inherent to the construction of such a State and to the achievement of sustainable political, social and economic development.

We have been investing in a democratic and effective model of a justice system, and strengthening institutions that ensure equal access, and delivering services to the people. Still, I must acknowledge that the application of Justice in fragile States and consolidation of State institutions affected by conflict entails great complexity.

Fragile countries typically have serious institutional, procedural and operational weaknesses.

The theme of the meeting – **Supporting Core Government Functions to address Fragility and Sustain Peace**, reminds us again that every citizen has a fundamental right: the right to live – most importantly to live in peace and deserve to have access to services by the Government of the day.

We are called “fragile” or sometimes, “failed states”. “Illegitimate Governments”, “weak states”, “Hostile situation”, to name a few, are the stigmas attached to our countries. Such descriptions of our situation sometimes over-cloud the mindset of development and humanitarian experts and policy makers. This is something I am personally dealing with at this moment, where the mindset of our neighboring, super-rich and super-developed country, working hand-in-hand with the oil companies, is centered exclusively on the amount of money they can reap from the natural gas reserves that legitimately belong to the people of Timor-Leste.

Hence, our states and the indigenous potential and capacity of our institutions are undermined globally. Such stigmas have even scared away investors in private sector which is a backbone for employment and livelihood generation.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

Fostering and Sustaining Peace is at the centre of agenda of the g7+. Most of our member countries have been mired in decades of suffering caused by conflicts, violence, terrorism , etc. Some of the countries have been able to break the torturous cycle of suffering and have pursued peace, and stability. At the core of such successful transition towards peacefulness lies the strong will of the leaders and people of these countries. The causes of violence can be external or internal;

But fostering peace and stability require the Nation to own the pathway of the transition. This is evidenced from the trajectory of my own country, Timor-Leste and our giant neighbour, Indonesia. The peaceful co-existence of both countries in the coming decades would require us to forget the bitter past at the cost of brighter future characterized by friendly relation, mutual trade and cooperation.

With this note, let me outline **three main lessons** that characterize our trajectory of development in g7+ countries:

First, despite the fact that our Nations are fragile; our people are resilient as they have survived and still survive colonization, foreign aggression, civil war, terrorism and natural wraths. They live decades of troubles with belief in peace and resilience.

Look at Afghanistan that has been circus-ground for regional and international interest for the last 4 decades. The price is paid by Afghan men and women and kids.

See Somalia that has been struggling to maintain minimum standard of livelihood for its people amidst extremism, famine and internal conflicts.

Think about Sierra-Leone, Liberia and Guinea who had just started consolidating their institutions after years of civil wars, when their strengths and development gains were once again tested by the outbreak of Ebola.

The list of such countries goes on.... however, in all these countries, people still dare to hope for better tomorrow. They still aspire to leave a better legacy for the generations to come. They never give up while fragile, if they were, would fall.

In addition, the state institutions such as security, justice, health and education contain challenges that are much bigger than the resources available to them. Incapacitated these institutions maybe, but they are not failed. They are capable of providing core services if they are led by committed leadership and sufficient resources are put at their disposal.

My own country, Timor-Leste, started from the ashes of 24 years of brutal occupation, that was supported by a western country that proclaimed every year at the United Nations' General Assembly the right of all territories to self-determination and Independence, but in practice stepped all over these universal principles to steal our oil and gas, signing with our occupier an exploitation treaty in exchange for 50% of the resulting revenue; and turning a blind eye and thus allowing for the loss of more than 200,000 Timorese lives during our resistance war. Today, with just 16

years of existence, Timor-Leste is among the group of resilient nations. The credit goes to the leadership equipped with sufficient revenues from its own natural resources. But not all countries are bestowed with natural resources, but would rather have to rely on external aid.

Despite their dependency, these countries need to win the trust of their citizens to prove their legitimacy. Such efforts are sometimes hindered by the fact that they also have to win over the parallel mechanisms, institutions and systems that are in place by development partners.

Each of the development and humanitarian intervention leaves behind legacy of distorted salaries, complicated frameworks and parallel units that the countries have to deal with in the aftermath. Therefore, our people and our states are not fragile nor are they failed. They are just in need of the right support that is sufficient to bring about self-reliance.

Second, the delivery of core services is the ultimate responsibility of the state. There is no doubt that we need to build our institutions so that they are capable of serving our people's contemporary needs.

However, there are countless priorities that we need to sequence and address them:

- a) The first and foremost is durable peace and stopping the suffering of human beings. Unless we have peace, our efforts of building state are all in vein.
- b) Peace should be the number one priority upon which all actors have to be united. We need to foster country led dialogue and reconciliation that bring about peace.
- c) The political leadership should put aside all the difference and aim at making and building peace.
- d) Foreign actors should mobilize all tracks of diplomacy to make this possible.

All this might seem inspirational talk in the world of politics and technocracy, but we have learned it from our own trajectory of development.

Without making peace with our neighbour, Indonesia, that occupied us for 24 years, we would have never been able to stand on our own feet as a nation. Without putting our National interest above all, we would not be able to prevent conflict in 2006. We would have been pushed into perpetual dependency.

It is important to recognize and understand that **peace** needs to be actively maintained, peace cannot just not be taken for granted. This requires recognizing the centrality of compromise when in the presence of different perspectives, diverging interests and conflicting views.

Sometimes there may be a need to buy peace, if needed for the greater common good. During phases of special fragility, such as in the immediate aftermath of a conflict, reconciliation is the number one priority.

Third, state institutions evolve over time given political leadership and sufficient resources. This process of evolution, which is intrinsic in nature, takes place in a given context and culture of the country.

The mindset of rich and developed countries and their agents, including diplomats and experts, is to maintain dependence in all aspects. They consider that the people of poor and underdeveloped countries cannot think, and do not have the right to make decisions; and they proclaim their right to determine the future of these people. The fight against this mindset is what unfortunately keeps me from being with you today.

There is a need of support to nurture that evolution instead of imposing imported solutions. Academics know this fact very well, that the transformation of the institutions is a long-time phenomenon.

Attempting to transform state institutions overnight based on external and irrelevant assumption, has always ended up in frustration.

Every year billions of dollars are spent in the form of technical assistance to fix the targeted institutions in these countries. However, there is very little or no attention to investing in higher education in these countries that can have lasting impact on the capability of the generations to come.

Similarly, billions of dollars are spent to react to incidents of famine and drought such as those in Somalia, Yemen, and South Sudan and other countries.

The impact of such interventions tend to be short-lived despite being expensive. Even if a portion of such investment is diverted to the potential such as construction of dams, roads and irrigation, it will have huge impact and will tend to produce durable results.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, I want to reiterate that the g7+ members are committed to accelerating the issues listed in the new Agenda 2030, in particular Goal 16 - which is dealing with peace, justice and effective institutions. And member states have begun to set a clear path for progressing towards the SDGs, giving proper consideration to the national context.

As we embark to implement the SDG 16, we must maintain a critical view of the process and make monitoring a key part to ensure we remain on the right track. This requires both sound cooperation with our developed partners and a careful and inclusive internal process that involves not only Governments and public agencies but also civil society and the community.

Our commitment to promoting the g7+ is also based on our strong desire to share experiences, strengthen Fragile to Fragile Cooperation, implement the SDGs and, naturally, strive to live up to the motto: ***“leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first”***.

So let's embrace shared prosperity, peace and development for all of us.

Thank you !