



46th EUCOCO

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE FOR SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY WITH THE SAHARAWI PEOPLE

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY

**FORMER PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER OF TIMOR-LESTE, CHIEF
NEGOTIATOR OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE FINAL DELIMITATION OF
MARITIME BOUNDARIES AND EMINENT PERSON OF g7+**

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Excellencies

The Sahrawi Prime Minister, Bucharaya Beyun

The President of EUCOCO, Pierre Galand

Distinguished Members of Parliament, including Timor-Leste Parliament

Ambassadors and other special guests

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen,

More than sixty years after the United Nations "*Declaration on Decolonisation*", I address this audience with mixed feelings. While I am obviously happy to take part in this forty-sixth EUCOCO, I am also saddened and troubled to see that our Saharawi brothers and sisters have not yet gained their freedom and independence.

Western Sahara should by now be part of the international multilateral system. Western Sahara should have left behind its history of human rights violations, suffering and despair.

This is the 46th (Annual) European Conference for Support and Solidarity with the Saharawi people!

In short, the history of Western Sahara is not much different from other parts of the planet where people lived peacefully and in balance with nature until colonialism and imperialism – greed and power – turned the lives and civilisation of an entire people on their heads.

What followed is known only too well by the peoples of Africa. There were revolts and resistance, alongside pacification campaigns that were anything but peaceful. It is outrageous how subjugation and exploitation are the main legacies of colonialism.

And yet, history tells us that in most cases the policies of extermination and

pacification by the colonising powers are met with national and political consciousness that grows into a national identity and a desire by those peoples to win their freedom. This happened both in Western Sahara as in my own country of Timor-Leste, where the people fought and made sacrifices for national independence.

In the 1960's, Western Sahara, Timor and other colonies entered the radars of the UN and decolonisation movements, being considered as "Non-Self-Governing Territories". The geopolitical context back then was rather adverse, being dominated by the interests of the Cold War.

The destinies of our territories never truly belonged to us. Instead they were forged by key world players, such as the US, France, Germany and the UK, with the support of allied regional powers. It was a time of neo-colonialist hubris, in which these countries decided on the alleged "best solutions for world peace"!

In the case of Timor-Leste, the Carnation Revolution of 1974 and the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship gave us hope that we might gain our freedom and independence. Unfortunately, one year later we were invaded by Indonesia, on 7 December, with the complicity of the West.

Surprisingly, on 16 October 1975, the International Court of Justice established quite clearly that Western Sahara was a non-self-governing territory and that it should follow the parameters and the principle set in the "UN General Assembly Resolution on self-government through the free and genuine expression of the will of the people in the territory".

The resilience of the Timorese people, organised into armed, clandestine and diplomatic fronts, benefited from the support that the internationally recognised Portuguese administration started providing some years later.

On the other hand, Western Sahara was abandoned to its fate by Spain, which did not live up to its responsibilities.

In the case of Timor, it pays to recall that this new war in Southeast Asia started

shortly after the US lost the war in Vietnam, at a time when the West feared the expansion of Socialist regimes.

The United States of America provided training in the US to the Indonesian military and supplied it with fighter jets and napalm bombs from the Vietnam War. These caused many victims amongst the helpless Timorese population that was resisting in our mountains. Further, the Indonesian military received weapons, tanks and warships from European powers.

Also, perhaps equally as important in a world dominated by greed, Timor had coffee and other resources – particularly oil and gas, which was discovered the decade before the Indonesian invasion.

It is known that while the world was turning a blind eye to the war that the Timorese people were waging with great suffering, Australia – the only Western country to acknowledge the criminal annexation by Indonesia – began negotiations seeking to establish maritime boundaries with Indonesia. Indeed, in 1989 Australia and Indonesia signed an agreement called the Timor Gap Treaty, which divided in half the valuable resources contained in the Timor Sea. These resources belonged to an independent Timor-Leste.

We find ourselves speechless in realising that this approach is also the policy that the West has been following over the years in relation to the people of Western Sahara.

Being completely forsaken by the international community, we realised that it was impossible to defeat an enemy that was supported both in terms of material and by the stance taken in the General Assembly when debating the right by the people of Timor-Leste to self-government and independence. Therefore, at a meeting with Colonel Purwanto, the Commander of the Indonesian Forces in Timor-Leste, held during a cease-fire in the guerrilla zone in March 1983, I presented him with our Peace Proposal and requested him to deliver it to President Soeharto.

I was advocating a peaceful solution to the suffering of the Maubere people, by

way of a referendum to be held under the banner of the UN to determine the future of Timor-Leste according to the free choice of the Timorese people.

Looking at the process in Western Sahara, it pains me to remember that it was in June 1990 that the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution no. 690 establishing the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

From that moment on, and upon learning of that UN Resolution, I told the armed and clandestine fronts of the Timorese Resistance to keep fighting and to put their trust in international principles, because after Western Sahara it could be Palestine's or Timor-Leste's turn.

It was absolutely necessary to recall this process that would be taking place in Western Sahara, since the Peace Plan we had presented back in 1983 was having no positive impact at all. On the contrary, votes in favour of Indonesia in the General Assembly increased year by year, undermining the right of the people of Timor-Leste to self-government and independence. And further, the long wait did not exactly fill our people with hope.

However, in 1992 I learned that the Referendum in Western Sahara had been postponed. I cannot convey to you how disillusioned I was. To make matters worse, I had to endure this period of hardship for myself and the Maubere people alone, in an Indonesian prison cell.

The Indonesian Government tried to persuade us to accept the status of autonomy but we refused!

For the Timorese Resistance, this was indeed a long process that ended on 30 August 1999, with a Popular Consultation carried out under the banner of the United Nations, where despite an atmosphere of violence and intimidation our people voted overwhelmingly for independence. We had to wait for 16 long years until the international community coordinated with the objective to uphold the right of the Maubere people to self-government and independence, thus putting an end to the

unjust war!

Similar to Western Sahara, for whose Referendum process the UN established MINURSO, in Timor-Leste the UN established a Mission called UNAMET.

What some of you probably do not know is that in June 1999 the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Mr Ian Martin, visited me in jail to inform me that the UN would be postponing the Referendum, or Popular Consultation as it was called, claiming that the situation was getting worse and that many Timorese people were becoming victims of violence perpetrated by the Indonesians or their militias.

I immediately told Mr Ian Martin that I refused to postpone anything. I reminded him that Timor-Leste had been abandoned by the international community for over 24 years of occupation by Indonesia and that more than 200,000 Timorese people had died from hunger, disease and especially from the enemy's bullets and bombs. The Representative of the Secretary-General tried to convince me that it was a principle of the United Nations "not to move forward with a process when one cannot put an end to the violence".

Again I told him no. I said that we would not accept any postponement, since the UN had postponed the Referendum in Western Sahara back in 1992 and the Western Saharawi people were still waiting for it 7 years later, without seeing any actual steps being taken to make that Referendum a reality. As such, I requested him to convey to Secretary-General Kofi Annan that I would not be accepting any postponement. He did as I asked, and today the Timorese people are most thankful to Mr Ian Martin and to Secretary-General Kofi Annan in particular for sticking with the decision to hold the Referendum as scheduled.

People who fight for a right that is internationally recognised are deserving of international solidarity. And yet Western Sahara is consistently forgotten by the global agenda, which is ruled by obscure interests.

The Security Council has issued over fifty resolutions on this matter, and yet

they are but a drop in an ocean ruled by billionaire interests, in which the political strategies by powerful countries trump international law.

It is time to tell the world: "Enough!" It is time to implement every relevant UN resolution that leads to a referendum on self-rule by the Saharawi people!

Thirty years have gone by from 1992 to 2022! Had we abided by the UN principles stating that referendums should be postponed at the first signs of violence, our popular consultation would not have taken place in 1999. Instead we would now be in our 23rd year of waiting for the right time. Instead, and because we chose to reject these weak principles, this year Timor-Leste is able to celebrate its 20th anniversary as an independent State!

Excellencies,

Still I would remind everyone that people never fight just for their independence. They do not fight just to have a flag, an anthem, a president, a government or periodic elections. There are many other dreams that feed the ideal of independence, such as working towards the development and progress of those people.

Sadly, one cannot assess colonial domination and its consequences without mentioning the Western policies of resource exploitation and the total disregard for the lives of thousands of people.

For years, the Australian government and multinational companies were accomplices of the tragedy taking place in my country, since having power and control over those resources was more important than human consequences.

Just two months prior to Timor-Leste regaining its independence, Australia withdrew from every compulsory resolution procedure concerning maritime boundary disputes, therefore making it impossible for Timor-Leste to request an international tribunal to rule on final maritime boundaries with Australia.

On the first day of our independence we were led to sign a Treaty restoring the

agreements Australia had made with our previous occupier, so as to maintain its rights and benefits over the Timor Sea.

Australia went further still. Two years after our independence, the Australian government placed illegal listening devices in the office of the Timorese government during the negotiations on the sharing of resources. By the time we became aware of these actions we had already signed a Treaty establishing a 50-year moratorium on maritime boundary negotiations.

Timor-Leste was a young and inexperienced country that desperately needed revenues to raise its people from extreme poverty. This Treaty meant the difference between a future of hope or one of misery and total dependence on more powerful countries.

To us, this was more than fighting over sovereignty and jurisdiction over our maritime area and the natural resources therein. It meant the final step in our anticolonial struggle. Once again the Timorese people refused to give in to the system of vested interests and called on the international system of justice to resolve its maritime dispute with Australia. As such, Timor-Leste is now free to choose its own path.

Additionally, we came to realise that Western Sahara is also the victim of shameful acts by multinationals, motivated by economic ambition, which jeopardise the future of the Saharawi people. I have no doubt that the illegal foreign exploitation of the Saharawi natural resources is a violation of international law. It is illegal and it is immoral!

And yet the world remains silent and complicit while commercial agreements and billionaire deals continue exploiting natural resources in occupied territories.

The world turns a blind eye to the suffering of children, youths, men and women exiled from their native land and forced to live in refugee camps. People whose only "fault" is that they dream of achieving their legitimate and inalienable right of sovereignty.

I believe that Timor-Leste and Australia, which ended up participating in the process in good faith, provided a good example of how it is possible to overcome divergences peacefully while at the same time decolonising the legal order and international relations.

The reprehensible actions by the US and Spain, as well as the complicity of countries in the European Community, strengthen Morocco's position. Indeed, this country seems very confident in the total ineptitude of the United Nations.

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since 2010, Timor-Leste has been part of a group of fragile and/or conflict or post-conflict States, of which it is a founding member, called "g7+". This group consists of around 20 countries that have come together to try to change global sustainable development policies and to promote peace.

The United Nations and the International Community need to change the approach they have used so far. One of the mottos of the "g7+" group is that "without peace there can be no development!". Likewise, we can also say that "without development there can be no peace!"

If we want a world of peace and free of inequalities, then we must respect each nation's processes. It is also imperative to have diplomatic efforts seeking to find solutions that safeguard the peaceful popular will of people. Every permanent member of the United Nations Security Council must be more actively engaged in international diplomacy, so as to find peaceful common resolutions.

The world needs the United Nations to be more in tune with the principles that led to its creation. In order to deal with the threats of the 21st century we can no longer postpone the reform of the Security Council, making it more legitimate and effective.

Multilateralism is the answer. However, an international organisation can only be credible if it provides answers to the needs of today, instead of closing itself inside

a mechanism created to deal with the problems that existed over 75 years ago.

Consequently I advocate expanding the Security Council permanent members in order to have greater representativeness. Similar to what we advocate for our small group of fragile countries (the g7+), it is important that there is a strong, collective voice that represents the realities and perspectives lived by the nations of the 21st century and that enables the world to overcome stalemates like the one that presently exists in Western Sahara.

Understanding that MINURSO is still active it reminds me of the Peace Keeping Forces in Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and other places, where they are for more than two decades but there is no peace in those countries.

We believe that peace is built on genuine cooperation and development policies, as well as on much dialogue and diplomacy, based on respect for the intrinsic realities of each nation. Peace can never be built on economic and military strength and might. The world needs peace and every people in the world needs safety, freedom and dignity.

Thus I plead for reconciliation and negotiation between the Polisario Front and Morocco. I plead for exhaustive dialogue in good faith between the parties, so as to achieve a negotiated peaceful solution that is acceptable for both parties, while respecting the will of the Saharawi people.

I urge the International Community, particularly the United Nations Security Council, to make good on its responsibilities in this process so as to help restore international law. The legitimacy of international architecture rests on this effort!

I urge the Secretary-General of the UN, António Guterres, a great friend of Timor-Leste and who was also the Prime Minister of Portugal, at the time of our Referendum, to embrace the just cause of the Saharawi people, just like Kofi Annan embraced the Timorese cause over twenty years ago.

This week we learned of the sad news of the passing of Francesc Vendrell, a

diplomat instrumental in the cause of Timor-Leste, from the invasion to the involvement of the United Nations, including the drafting of the General Assembly resolutions that led to the Referendum. Francesc Vendrell was a staunch fighter for the principles of the UN, a brilliant diplomat and a global peacemaker, who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Timor-Leste in 2009. The world needs more diplomats of this calibre, which will also allow the United Nations to regain its full credibility.

As a former guerrilla fighter in the liberation of Timor-Leste, I am very impressed with the interventions this morning in the Inter-parliamentarian Conference, which gave me more confidence that the network between Parliaments around the world will help our Saharawi brothers and sisters, so that we can end the violation of their human rights and the exploitation of their natural resources, and that they finally have their referendum, thus giving voice to people made silent by the ambition, selfishness and supremacy of the rich and powerful.

Closing the process peacefully in the last African colony is a test for all of humanity, but most of all it is a test for those who were once colonisers to show that there is still time to correct the wrongs in Western Sahara!

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão