

A Summary of Jose Ramos Horta's Speech
on "Human Rights in East Timor"

delivered at International Christian University on January 9, 1997

Mr. Horta began his speech by expressing his pleasure at being invited to speak at ICU. He emphasized, however, that if anyone from East Timor should have won the Nobel Peace Prize, it should be Xanana Gusmao, leader of the East Timor independence movement, who has been imprisoned in Jakarta since 1992.

Since the Nobel Committee announced the award for Bishop Belo and himself, Mr. Horta is impressed by the dramatic change in awareness all over the world of the issue of East Timor. The current attention contrasts sharply with the international political climate in 1975 when Indonesian troops invaded East Timor, condoned by major global and regional powers. At that time, the hypocrisy of the UN Security Council, the Cold War, civil wars in other countries and excuses offered by the Indonesian government conspired to keep the oppression of the East Timorese out of international public awareness.

Soon after the invasion of East Timor by Indonesian troops, on December 7, 1975, the Security Council adopted a unanimous resolution (No. 384), calling on Indonesia to withdraw its troops without delay. The resolution also affirmed the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination. However, many countries that voted in favor of the resolution were also selling weapons to Indonesia at the same time. As he visited the world's capitals to get support for East Timor, he was told that he should be realistic and accept the invasion as a *fait accompli*. In essence, these countries were ignoring international law, UN resolutions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and accepting the irreversibility of military might.

The Indonesian government offered many justifications for the invasion. They alleged that Fretilin, a leading resistance group was communist and that East Timor

was in danger of becoming a communist enclave. Then, they said that if East Timor were allowed to become independent, it would encourage the dismembering of the Indonesian Republic. Mr. Horta thinks if that were a real fear, then the government should re-evaluate how it deals with ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples on the islands. The Indonesian government also insists that the troops invaded by invitation from the East Timorese people because four political parties supposedly representing the people of East Timor signed an invitation to liberate East Timor from the "reign of terror" of Fretilin, which they claimed was a communist organization. However, this kind of spurious justification was the same kind offered by the Soviet Union when it invaded Afghanistan, Iraq when it invaded Kuwait, Vietnam when it invaded Cambodia.

In fact, Indonesia does not have any historical or legal claim to East Timor apart from the argument that it was invited by the people. Indonesia has never claimed any territory outside of the boundary of the Dutch East Indies. Although there was a brief civil war in August-September 1975, in which hundreds were killed or wounded, a conflict in a country gives no right to another country to intervene in it. If a situation in a territory or a region raises issues of security, a request can be made to the UN Security Council for consultation. However, there was no request from Indonesia or any other country for the UN to intervene in the civil war in East Timor.

Mr. Horta does not blame the UN for failing to intervene in the conflict. He asserted that the UN is only as effective as its member states want it to be. He regrets that the UN and its officials have become scapegoats for the lack of resolve in the international community or that its reputation in peacekeeping has been besmirched by the USA and other countries' troops becoming part of the conflict in Somalia and Bosnia. He wonders if it is inevitable that international relations will always be characterized by the hypocrisy created by the seeming contradiction and conflict of interest between trade relations and national interests on the one hand, and the promotion of human rights and democracy on the other. He feels that the defense of

universal values is necessary for a country's credibility. If a country surrenders all its principles of justice, human rights and democracy every time there is a conflict with another country, that country loses any credibility, prestige and reputation in international relations.

Mr. Horta offered Costa Rica and Norway as examples of small countries whose governments and leaders have had enormous international prestige because of the principles they have stood for. Oscar Arias, the former President of Costa Rica, won the Nobel Peace Prize a few years ago for his efforts to bring peace to Central America. The USA failed to help to bring peace to the region precisely because it was party to the conflict there. The government of Norway initiated dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis, mediated the conflict in Guatemala and is now trying to bring peace in the Sudan. The USA, France or Japan, on the other hand, do not often act in the role of mediator in international conflicts because by and large, they are behind one or another party to the conflict and they are distrusted because they are perceived to adhere only to economic gains.

Mr. Horta then discussed how he sees a way out of the conflict between the government of Indonesia and the people of East Timor. His council is prepared and more than willing to meet with the Indonesian government without preconditions, perhaps using the UN mechanism or other form of third party mediation. He said that the main problems are as follows:

- 1) The number of Indonesian troops in East Timor is excessive. He estimates that there are between 20,000 to 30,000 troops stationed there, although the government denies this. The troops have shot children and young adults in the back or in the head simply for taking part in peaceful demonstrations.
- 2) There are more than 1,000 political prisoners who should be released as a gesture of goodwill.
- 3) The transmigration program should be halted. There are between 100,000 to 200,000 Indonesians in East Timor, taking over the best jobs and the best land, which

is a major source of resentment and social instability there.

4) The number of civil servants should be reduced and/or replaced by international observers from NGOs and UN specialized agencies such as the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

5) Indonesia should grant the people of East Timor limited autonomy, where people in the territory could elect a local assembly or parliament that would have powers only on issues of a domestic nature such as land, economic development, justice and immigration. Their strategy is to avoid discussing whether East Timor is the 27th province of Indonesia or a territory under Portuguese administration.

Looking to the future, Mr. Horta is hopeful for many changes in Indonesia. The Suharto regime may end within a decade and a new Indonesia may be born from a generation liberated from the paranoia over national security, where everyone is suspected of bringing down the regime. He mentioned the censorship of intellectuals and the media, and the imprisonment of labor leaders as two aspects of this old security mentality. He is inspired by the examples of democracy movements in South Korea, The Philippines, Thailand and Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters in Burma. If the same transformations were to take place in Indonesia, the people of East Timor may decide to remain with Indonesia or the people of Indonesia might not mind East Timor becoming independent.

Mr. Horta appealed to other countries to play a role in changing Indonesia. He said that it is not always necessary to confront or embarrass the government of Indonesia with public statements. Discreet diplomacy is also effective as long as it does not translate into doing nothing; it must be serious and sustained. If Indonesia undertakes concrete initiatives in East Timor, then Japan should increase its assistance to Indonesia. Japan and Western countries might have a better chance of seeing their strategic and economic interests protected in Indonesia if they encourage Indonesia to change rather than selling it or helping it to purchase more weapons. As a rule, there should be no introduction of weapons into countries where the actions of gov-

ernments are not checked by public opinion.

Mr. Horta said this is a crucial time of change in Indonesia. Whoever thought that the Berlin Wall would collapse? Democracy can prevail in Indonesia and freedom can come to East Timor. He knows that if East Timor were to become independent, it would be a loss of face and disappoint a lot of people, particularly the bureaucrats in Foreign Ministries all around the world who are not accountable to anyone. So on the day East Timor becomes independent, he will send them messages of apology: "Forgive us for disappointing you. Now we are free. We are independent."

(Reporter: John McLaughlin, ICU SSRI research fellow)