



**GOVERNO DE  
TIMOR-LESTE**

Gabinete do Ministro da Justiça

**Remarks By**

**H. E. Dionísio Babo Soares, PhD.**

**Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste Minister of  
Justice**

**Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and  
Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific**

**“The importance of civil registration and vital statistics for  
the development of Timor-Leste”**

**24-28 November 2014 - Bangkok, Thailand**

Honourable Ministers and high representatives of the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand, host of this Ministerial Conference,

Honourable representatives of the United Nations Economic and Social Council,

Honourable Ministers of Home Affairs, Justice, Interior and Health, from across Asia and the Pacific,

Your Excellencies high representatives of the co-organizers of this Ministerial Conference,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Observer Delegations,

Senior Government Officials,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to have this opportunity to address you at this important Ministerial Conference.

I would like at the outset to express my gratitude to the Kingdom of Thailand, host of this relevant event and where the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, established in 1947 (nineteen forty-seven), has here, in this city of Bangkok, its headquarters.

To have, use and wisely benefit from an universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems is not only fundamental to support good governance and, therefore, sustainable development, allowing to achieve more accurate decisions, but considering the impact in citizens daily lives, it emerge as a mandatory political commitment to the populations we represent and sworn to serve, their rights and their dreams.

Your Excellencies,

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, my country, restored independence, becoming a sovereign State, on 20 May 2002.

This historical milestone was achieved through tremendous sacrifice and determination of the Timorese people, of which over 200,000 (two hundred thousands) lost their lives during the foreign occupation between 1975 and 1999.

In those difficult times, violent deaths, enforced disappearances and forced displacements become so usual that no one was interested in public record it, as well as births, often shrouded in countless sufferings, resulting from unwanted pregnancies.

State infrastructure was, once again, destroyed and the existing civil registry records, including birth and death records, were also wrecked during the violence, consequently the documentation of almost the entire population of Timor-Leste was permanently lost, urging to be restored.

The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was established in October 1999 to administer the territory until a new government could be elected.

After the restoration of independence in 2002, Decree-Law 2/2004, of 4 February 2004, established the new legal regime of the civil registration, revoking UNTAET preceding regulation.

Now's days Timor-Leste enjoys greater stability and Government is being urged to resolve the ongoing tensions, offer its citizens tangible social and economic benefits, improve the quality of life of the rural population and fight high levels of unemployment.

Despite these challenges this young nation has made significant progress since the restoration of independence in 2002, including the setting up of institutional infrastructure needed in a sovereign democratic State.

Concerning civil registration and vital statistics and observing article 3 of the Constitution, recognising that the "acquisition, loss and reacquisition of citizenship, as well as its registration and proof, shall be regulated by law", the new Civil Registration Code is right now in public discussion at district level.

It's also important to mention that the establishment of the civil registration and vital statistics national coordination mechanism is about to be formally approved after a long and sometimes hard internal negotiations period where individual and sectorial responsibilities are not always faced as shared responsibilities, not preventing duplications of functions and information, hindering the effective use of civil registration.

The V Constitutional Government and the Ministry of Justice, through her National Directorate of Civil Registration and Notary and the ministries of Health, the State Administration and most notably the General Director of Statistics of the Ministry of Finance, are deeply committed to advancing further more in the deconcentration, and posterior eventual decentralisation, of the registration process to the district and sub-district and village levels.

At present there are 13 civil registration offices, one in every district, working together with the National Health Service and, complementary, with the successful experience of the mobile registration unit allowing to have effective access to hard-to-reach and marginalized populations.

As our country has not yet established Civil Registry Offices beyond the district level, the Ministry of Justice joined efforts with the Ministries of State Administration and Health to increase coverage of birth registration by providing heads of communities and midwives the authority to notify births.

Yet there are still things to be done. The grand project “Get everyone in the picture”, I can proudly say, has started in Timor-Leste, yet I must also agree that “not everyone has been included in the picture”.

Your Excellencies,

That is why my Government and I both consider this Ministerial Conference, the future political declaration “Get everyone in the picture” in Asia and the Pacific and the proclamation of 2015-2024 as the “Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade” a unique opportunity to boost sustainable social and economic development for our countries.

In fact, considering that the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region is home to 4.1 billion people, two thirds of the world’s population, we have, necessarily, to be in “the picture”, but most important, we have to be able to use the information we collect from “the picture” to guide us in the decision making process, when addressing issues related to health, education or social security.

But this Ministerial Conference is also an important opportunity to improve regional cooperation, because we believe that knowing and respecting our traditions and customs, as well as our regional space where we are integrated is undoubtedly an asset we need to intensify.

As a territorial small state with a population of no more than 1.3 million of habitants, that restored the independence only in 2002, and having its economics success greatly anchored in the revenue generated from finite offshore oil and gas deposits, Timor-Leste deeply understand the importance of having an accurate national statistical system integrated with a reliable civil registration mechanism.

I appreciate that CRVS has emerged as an essential underpinning to the post-2015 development agenda and agree to the need for a “data revolution” as the production of sound statistics will allow efficient monitoring and evaluation of new development goals. Timor-Leste is committed to take the call for a “data revolution” as an action of priority and to enhance coordination in this regard.

The immediate strategies to follow on from this conference are to:

- Formalize an inter-ministerial working group through a government Decree;
- Finalize the development of a strategic plan for the implementation of CRVS and continue investing on the capacity of human resources and improving the infrastructure much needed for this project;
- Disseminate information and undergo a civic education to the whole population as well as establish mechanisms for continuing monitoring of this project.

Your Excellencies,

On my behalf and that of my Government, considering that we share a same vision concerning the relevant role of civil registration and vital statistics, recognizing the principles of appropriation, progressive realization, non-regression, non-discrimination and equity, bearing in mind the main goals and the targets we want to achieve until 2024, I would like to reaffirm our commitment to this process.

This is certainly in line with the vision of the Timorese people shaped in the Strategic Development Plan, anchored in four key attributes: political will, economic potential, national integration and a dynamic population.

And this is also a way of honouring our ancestors.

I thank you all.