# ***Peace & Perseverance: A Conversation with his Excellency José Ramos-Horta***

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Good evening. It's a pleasure to be here.

On my way here, as I was reflecting on this meeting and my trip to Myanmar in the next few days, I stopped myself, thinking "God, in this 21st century, do we still have to pursue all kinds of armed struggle- as legitimate as they may be, as justified as they may be- in order to achieve a political goal?" Because in the end it's a political goal. You don't fight to achieve a military goal for the sake of it. It's a political goal.

Of course, there is responsibility on all sides. In whatever the nature of the struggle, the nature of the conflict, the solution rests on all sides, not only the people who opted for armed struggle. I do not believe that the first option they dream up one day is "Okay, let's have an armed struggle." Often people are forced to a corner.

Some resist the temptation of picking up arms until the very end -- well, ask Mahatma Gandhi. Others, they don't think twice. Even Mandela, who was elevated to sainthood in his lifetime, under his leadership the ANC pursued armed struggle until the very end of apartheid.

I had the privilege of meeting with Mandela several times after he left prison, and I have the greatest respect for him as an extraordinary human being. And nothing diminishes my respect, respect for him that he opted for armed struggle to pursue the freedom of the majority of people in South Africa against apartheid.

It's great that there are these movements towards dialogue with governments in the region. It is still very difficult and there have been some set backs, but it is great to be here.

Let me start by sharing a little bit with you about Timor-Leste. Before coming to this room I have been on the phone, WhatsApp and email back to my country, because a few days ago- well a week ago- we had elections on 22 July. It passed absolutely peacefully, far more so even than I anticipated. I feared because there were three major parties and major personalities competing, not that there would be violence, but that tensions would be high. Normally, you know, if you have a debate of that nature, you have tensions - if there is not tension something must be wrong, everybody must be in agreement, and everybody cannot agree when we know there are still problems in the country. We have corruption, we have mismanagement, and we have waste. We have made a lot of good things. But even the Vatican, even the Pope, who is known to be infallible, has had to correct a lot of things over centuries.

So I thought we would have a quiet election, but we didn't have even the normal political tensions. The parties campaigned, the flags proliferated; rich parties, poor parties, rich people, poor people, they all competed. Of course, not on the same level playing field, in the sense one or two parties have much more money than the rest combined. Our democracy is becoming a typical democracy in Asia, meaning a money democracy. Very little differs from a democracy in Thailand, in Indonesia, in the Philippines, in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan. The only difference is that we learn very fast.

But still, when people ask me about the measure of democracy, I say, "Well, in my country, in a developing country, the main criteria for me is that no one gets killed because of some damn elections."

To the surprise of everyone, and particularly to the surprise of the main loser, Xanana Gusmao- you have probably heard, he is a great and charismatic leader. He reminds me a lot of Sukarno of Indonesia, and is sometimes described as like Mandela. He was a prisoner, very forgiving and was the one who led our national reconciliation. He is also a great orator, like Sukarno the founding father of Indonesia.

Well Xanana, he lost the election, and for a week, everybody was in suspense, because he had hidden himself in his home in the hills. When I was asked to comment why Xanana was absent, I said, "He is reflecting on the election result, first; and second, of course, also on its effect."

Today his party met, and he announced that he takes full responsibility for the defeat of the party, and resigned from the leadership of the party. He will stay in the party, but he resigned his leadership, and he is telling his party not to join in any coalition.

Xanana shows real statesmanship and is a lesson to many leaders around the world, in many countries who are creating problems right now, refusing to show dignity and integrity, pride, commitment to democracy, and not accepting the results when they lose.

For our country, a democracy of 15 years, it is remarkable, and because no party won an absolute majority -- the winning party, Fretilin, won by only one seat, by 900 votes. That again is an extraordinary measure of democracy, that a party can win only by few hundred votes and yet the second party didn't contest the result. We have a very strong established procedure, with electronic voting, and hundreds of foreign and international observers. Any claimant can go to our equivalent to the Supreme Court, yet no one lodged any complaint; everyone accepted the result.

So, we will see Fretilin, the winning party, trying to forge a coalition to govern. Not necessarily a very big coalition, Fretilin with two other parties will secure an absolute majority to govern.

We have recovered from the past of violence and destruction in 1999/2000. The country was thoroughly destroyed; some of you might have read or might have seen pictures or the film about it. Anyone who was there in 1999/2000, in the first few years of independence and saw the country and the destruction, if you would go again today, you would be impressed, surprised. We have electricity now, 24 hours a day for 80 per cent of the country. We have fibre optic now all

over the country with the new power lines. Right now if you travel in the country, you will see either brand new roads or roads under construction everywhere. We have a new port contracted to a French company, $400 million to build a new port to the west of Dili, the capital.

Now, almost 100 per cent of children of school age are enrolled. But this doesn't mean the school education is a quality education. We have serious problems with the quality of teachers, but school infrastructure has expanded enormously. But we still don't have enough because of the explosion of enrolment. And we have a challenge providing clean water to every school in the country.

We have a nutrition programme, so every child in school in the country is supposed to get one hot meal a day- consisting of rice, of beans, vegetables, and in some cases vitamin supplements. But you can imagine a country like ours with no proper roads- which we are only building now, and most of the roads are completely financed by our own funding, not from borrowing or international funding. 80 per cent of the expenditure in building roads all over the country comes from our Petroleum Sovereign Fund. Our Sovereign Fund, the Petroleum Fund is considered the best managed in Asia, the third best in the world.

In most countries that are mineral rich, the government has managed the revenues coming from oil and gas, diamonds, gold, and so on. It's not so in the case of Timor. We did something similar to the Norwegians. The Norwegians created what is called a Petroleum Fund. All the revenues from the export of oil go to that fund. That fund then invests in what they call Sovereign Fund.

In the case of Norway, 40 per cent is in US Treasury bonds and 60 per cent in diversified portfolios around the world. In our case we began with investing 100 per cent of our petroleum resources in US Treasury bonds. Only in 2009 we passed a new law that enabled us to diversify- so 60 per cent invested in US Treasury bonds and 40 per cent in diversified portfolios. We have invested in more than 1,000 portfolios around the word.

In less than 10 years, we have accumulated something like $16.5 billion. We created the petroleum law in 2004 and the Petroleum Fund was created in 2005, the moment we started to export oil and gas. We have very modest oil and gas reserves, nothing like Kuwait or Qatar, a bit closer to Brunei. But Brunei was primarily oil; ours is oil and gas. Our oil is similar to the Saudi oil, which is very light crude, easier and cheaper to refine, unlike the Kuwait oil, which is very expensive to refine.

So, we use the petroleum resources very wisely. The government doesn't have direct access to the Petroleum Fund. The revenues go directly to the Petroleum Fund, administered by the President of the Central Bank and a board, including the former Minister of Finance, the former Prime Minister, the former President, etc.

The board informs the Parliament -- the government is allowed to use only what is considered to be sustainable income of the Petroleum Fund. The president of the Central Bank writes a letter to the parliament every year to say, "This is the sustainable income that you can use."

So the country is doing well, but corruption is an issue- although our courts are fighting back and they are very harsh, a bit beyond proportion. I'm going to

write an opinion piece calling on the judiciary to think this through. The other day they sent a secretary of state of public works to jail for corruption. He got three years in jail. In another case a former minister of education, a great guy, but the accusations were proven. He appealed but the Court of Appeal reaffirmed the District Court verdict, and he was handcuffed and taken to prison. Seven years.

The former Minister of Finance was also given seven years, but for only an irregularity, not that she stole money. It has to do with $800,000 that was used to purchase hospital beds, and the beds are being used in our ICU, because her husband was part owner of the company the beds were purchased from. The law allowed the government to make direct purchase as long as it's emergency and you get three quotes: and the quote they got, it's cheaper and better quality than the other two quotes.

So you send someone like that to jail for seven years, and for less than a million dollars. So if someone stole $10 million you go for 14 years, 15 years? Someone steal $20 million, life in prison? Totally out of control.

Anyway, I feel bad for all these cases, because justice has to be fair and has to be proportional. Our judges and the justice system, has to understand Timor-Leste is not Norway, it's not Australia, it's not Portugal. It is a new country, fragile. The systems are not yet strong, and people do things sometimes- yeah, there is corruption.

But in the case of the Minister of Finance, in the case of the hospital beds, I volunteered to testify as character witness, to tell that this lady is a lady of enormous integrity. She actually set up our financial system that's one of the best in Asia; it's impossible for anyone to steal cash directly, you cannot do it.

When I was in Guinea-Bissau, the president of Guinea-Bissau told me- in frustration, because I was helping him in negotiations to form a government- he said, "President Ramos-Horta, here in Guinea-Bissau, everybody want to be a minister." I joked with him, "President, why don't we make every single person in this country a minister? And then the problem is resolved." So 1,600,000 ministers.

He said, "Everybody want to be a minister because they need only six months of stealing and they can build a palace." I told the president, "In my country, in East Timor, we also steal but slowly, over five years. You people here are a bit faster." Why in Guinea-Bissau they have to steal in six months, because the government doesn't last six months. In Timor, every government has lasted five years, so you don't have to be in a hurry. You steal gradually slowly over five years. Well, the problem is now you get caught now by justice.

This is in a nutshell, a little to tell you where we are in 15 years after so much destruction, with a lot of international help- in particular from Australia. Australia remains our biggest donor, followed probably by the European Union, followed by Japan, China's also there, but comes way down the list.

The Australian media, from time to time write articles discussing the "growing Chinese influence in Timor-Leste". Total nonsense. But I told them, "Listen, I'm

not even upset. You know why? Because of your misleading articles the Americans are paying more attention to East Timor. So please keep writing that the Chinese are taking over so that we have more help from Washington."

The US Naval Secretary came to Timor-Leste, and Hillary Clinton came to Timor-Leste. We have in Timor a good size American US Peace Corps, I was the one who argued in Washington, I lobbied to bring them to Timor. They do fantastic work with our communities. We also have a small US Navy detachment of Army engineers there they also do great work.

So we have more or less zero conflict with anyone, with the region.

As you know Timor-Leste is predominantly Catholic- 98 per cent active, devout Catholic, from young children young to older people. When you go to Australia, you go to Europe, you see only elderly people going to church. In Timor now, you see children of all ages, youth, adults, elderly, everybody going.

Indonesia, as you know, is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. It's not a Muslim country in the sense that they don't have a state religion, unlike Malaysia, but it is the largest Muslim majority nation, 250 million.

Timor-Leste was a victim of Indonesian aggression and occupation. And yet the two countries today have the best possible relationship of any two countries in South East Asia, or in Asia. You can compare Indonesia's relationship with Malaysia or with Singapore. There are some tensions, some rivalries. Or Thailand and Cambodia, Cambodia and Vietnam, Vietnam and China, Japan and China, Korea and Japan, India and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, etc. You have tensions in all of these.

But Timor-Leste and Indonesia have an exceptional relationship. And that has to do with our leadership. Upon independence we said, let's put the past where it belongs. We honoured the victims; we honoured those who fought and died, those who suffered and those who were victims of abuses.

But Indonesia itself was, as a country, as a people, victims of the Cold War. During those years, starting with Bolshevik revolution that had an impact around the world, people took sides. There were fears, prejudices, and perceptions- wrong, misinformed, or informed. In the process, millions died around the world, and Indonesia suffered as a result of the Cold War. In 1965/66, they had the worst massacre in the history of Indonesia. Between half a million and a million are estimated to have been killed during the six months' period when the Suharto regime took over.

And then came the invasion of Timor-Leste. Many of our people died. But one thing that we did, our leadership - not only Xanana but before him a great leader called Nicolau Lobato- said from day one in 1975, "We are not fighting the Indonesians as a people. We are fighting for freedom, for independence. We are not fighting against anyone." Indonesian military personnel who were captured in the field, not a single one, in 24 years of a struggle was killed. Those who were captured alive were returned after a few months, even though the Indonesian never returned our people. Timorese resistance fighters, activists, never touched a single Indonesian civilian life. Not one.

We never demonised the Indonesians as a people. We never mixed religion with the fight. Most fights are political. You know, if you fight for democracy in Iran, well, you are not fighting for the Shias or Sunnis or whatever interpretation of Islam. You are fighting for political power. And why should people of one interpretation of Islam or another die because of that?

I always said, when it came to violence, Suharto of Indonesia – the Indonesian dictator from 1965 to 1998- never discriminated when it came to violence. Whether you were Muslim, you were Hindu, you were Buddhist, he didn't care, as long as you challenged him. In Indonesia, when it came to violence by Suharto, it was equal opportunity for everybody. You couldn't even argue that, because we are Catholic, that's why. Even if we were the most devout Muslims in the world he would still have invaded and they would repress you if you challenged him. Ask the Acehnese. Aceh, the most Islamic province in Indonesia, in the past they were much more victimised than Timor-Leste in terms of violence.

So we opposed, we resisted pressure from friends- Amnesty International, members of the US Congress, members of the European Parliament- to push for an international tribunal. We said no, we didn't want an international tribunal. The Indonesian dictatorship fell in 1998, and there began a very difficult, painful transition to democracy. We must assist, and one way for Timor-Leste to assist them was to understand the difficulties of the transition to the democracy. Bringing in an outside element, an international tribunal, would have ignited even more polarisation in Indonesia, and would have endangered, or completely undermined any effort on our side to normalise the relationship with Indonesia.

The Indonesian side, they responded in kind to us. They saw that the Timorese understood their difficulties, understood their challenges, and so they turned around and embraced us. The Indonesians didn't behave like some other people, or leaders- when they lose, they get very vindictive, then they start creating problems for you. No, when the Indonesians realised- because they didn't know us much because in the past we were fighting in opposing trenches, but then when came 1999/2000, they started realising after all who we were- they turned around and walked halfway to meet us.

The referendum happened in August 1999 and the Indonesian military vacated the territory in September. The country was still burning. Early October, Xanana Gusmao and myself, we were in Indonesia meeting with the Indonesian military. And I remember sitting there, our small delegation and the other side of the table, something like 30 military personnel in green uniform, generals and so on. They all carried their name tags and I remember looking at their names, I recognised all those names from the past. And there we were, meeting with them.

We cleaned up all these relations. The Indonesian president, Gus Dur- a great human being, a great Muslim leader, he was very conciliatory. He came to Timor even before independence, in January 2000. Then Ibu Mega, Megawati Sukarnoputri, was more nationalist, more reluctant in relation to Timor-Leste. She also came for our independence celebration. Then Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono came three times. He was just there a few days ago, in Dili, for a regional meeting. And President Widodo, he came and he went to visit our

hero cemetery, where Timorese are buried. He also went to visit the Indonesian cemetery in Timor, which is very well kept. We didn't touch the Indonesian military cemetery.

So that's where we are in terms of Timor.

I have a book coming out in Sydney, it will be released in many cities. A book mostly of speeches and articles I wrote during my time in office and since. I'm writing an introduction to the book, and a reflection on the challenges that the world faces. Of course, some of you, and probably many around the world, have a very pessimistic view of where we are. 20 years ago at the end of the Cold War, there was incredible optimism, with the end of the Cold War and soon after apartheid ended. The Eastern/Central Europe Baltic States were freed. It was just unthinkable that Baltic States could be free.

I remember the first time in my life I met an Armenian person was in the US in a small well known prestigious university, called Wesleyan University. I went there in 1976. I met this historian from Armenia. I remember him saying, "You know, my brother, my country will never be free. But yours I hope will be."

Then sometime later I became good friends with an American ambassador, a lady called Melissa Wells. When she was younger, she was a synchronised swimmer in the Olympics, later she became a US ambassador in New York. She told me, "Jose, my country will never be free." She was referring to Lithuania; she came from Lithuania as a kid, age 6. Well, you know, 20 years later Lithuania was free.

So the unthinkable happened. Optimism spread to Asia. Before then it was only the Philippines that had freed itself. South Korea was still under the military. And then you had Thailand and all of that.

So, when I look at the bigger picture, what it was 50 years ago, what it was 30 years ago, what it is today. Of course with the change of history, the change of orders, there are setbacks, there are developments that happen beyond anyone's control. Not in our plan, not in our anticipation. Not in any wise academic analysis. Totally unpredictable.

So you have this huge setback. Then you have the rise of the extremism and violence. We hear more talk today about ISIS, and before ISIS, Al-Qaeda- Al-Qaeda, compared with ISIS, are moderate. Even Bin Laden was shocked with the extremism of Zarqawi, the guy who was operating in Iraq. If you look at the number of people killed through this violence, millions more Muslims of different interpretations of Islam died in the last many years than Europeans or Americans or any people of any other ethnicity or religion.

What does it all mean? My argument against some, Huntington and others, this is not a 'clash of civilisations'. This is a fight within Islam that has been going on for centuries, accelerating and accentuated because of the availability of weapons and communications. This has been in existence since the early times, and no different from the violence that plagued the Christian world for centuries. And where will this end? Well, there is no cut-off that it will end in such-and-such time. Unfortunately many people will die.

Three or four years ago in Geneva, I was giving a speech together with the former president of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari. We had several hundred people there in the Palais des Nations, and someone asked me about Syria. Well, I could have given one of those, cliché diplomatic answers, but I told the audience, "I am sorry, I am not going to give you a politically correct answer, a promising, hopeful answer. The war in Syria will go on for a long, long time. Do not forget the Iraq war, initiated by Saddam Hussein when he invaded Iran. It went on for eight years. Chemical and biological weapons were used. More than a million people died on the two sides, primarily on the Iranian side. The Kurds were gassed. The war ended only when the two sides, exhausted by the war, decided to sit down. But it was easier then because these were two states. As crazy as the leadership may have been, these were organised states. So when the leaders decided to end the war, it ended.

"Syria, it is no longer an organised state. You have on the one hand a portion of the state that is organised, and then you have more than 100 armed groups. Who are you going to negotiate with? Most of Syria has ceased to be an organised state and become a huge battlefield where many interests, regional interests, rival interests, extra-regional interests, plus different interpretations of Islam are at play. In the middle of it you have some religious and ethnic minorities who are caught up. The conflict will go on for a long, long time. I'm not going to tell you, when it's going to end."

This was, three or four years ago. Then everybody blamed Russia and China. Really, Russia and China are the main problems of Syria? Partly, maybe. But maybe we in the UN one day we will thank Russia and China for not allowing the UN to be involved in the war in Syria. Why did China and Russia veto the resolution on Syria? Well I remember a few years earlier, the Security Council was meeting on Libya. There was talk about Benghazi, that there was going to be a bloodbath there, the killing of civilians by Libyan Air Force. So the Security Council must authorise a mission to create a no-fly zone to stop any Libyan Air Force from going to Benghazi to bomb the people, because Benghazi was a hotbed of the opposition.

Well, Russia and China naively signed on the resolution, and what did it become? It was no longer a humanitarian mission but a regime-change mission. They bombed the hell out of Gaddafi. Gaddafi a few weeks earlier had said, "After me, you will see what will happen." Well, we have seen what happened in Libya.

So the Russians and Chinese said "You are not going to use the Security Council again to justify your regime-change policy." And it was the US, France, and the UK- they were gung-ho on Libya and wanted to be gung-ho on Syria, but the Russians said no. Are the Russians innocent? I'm not saying that, the Chinese maybe are the ones that are more innocent because they are not directly involved.

Then you have numerous other problems where there are repercussions for Europe- the millions of refugees, immigrants fleeing to Europe. I gave a speech in Vienna only a year ago. I was asked to give a speech by the OSCE, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This is a multilateral body made up of 58 countries or 60 countries from the US to Canada to all of Europe, Russia, Ukraine, and all the way to Mongolia.

And that particular year they decide to invite me as the keynote speaker and asked me to speak on anything I wanted. Well, I decide to tell them -- because usually are the Europeans and Americans lecturing us, giving us speeches about the challenges in the world. Well, I said, "Let me talk about your problems. For once."

The speech was slightly long, but one thing I said focused on the movement of people, refugees and immigration. I said, "Look, for hundreds of years we have witnessed the movement of people. Some of countries that exist today, they exist as a the result of the movement of people. Some of the movement of people replaced others that were there before the new people arrived hundreds of years ago."

Europeans went to the Americas- North, Central, and South- to Australia and New Zealand, because of religious wars in Europe, because of poverty and even forced labour. And now we are witnessing the demographic changes, similar to the ones that occurred hundreds of years ago. We are witnessing today, millions of people dislocating from North Africa and Asia, going to Europe. Changing the demography of Europe. And this is inexorable. This is unstoppable; it is going to happen. In many ways, it's natural and not necessarily negative. We will see, generations from now, a very colourful Europe, very multicultural. Or, they will all become again one single culture. Who knows? But in the process, a lot of changes, a lot of upheaval, a lot of prejudices.

Responsibility lies with the people of Europe and their leaders in Europe, they have to inspire and guide their people, the generation of today. They have to show that people can live together, that they can co-exist.

When you look at the incident that happened in London, during the fire in the tower, Muslim residents rescued many people in the tower. In the Philippines, I just heard from friends from in the city of Marawi, when the ISIS affiliated group/ISIS sympathisers took over the city, and it was Filipino Muslims who rescued a lot of Christians who were trapped in the building. In Kenya, two years ago, when there was a big attack by Al Shabab in a university and hundreds were killed, it was Kenyan Muslims who protected and sheltered Christian students from being attacked.

So there is this humanity that cuts across the world and across religions and culture and that give me hope, without the illusion that it's going to be simple.

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Question and Answer Session

QUESTION: I am just curious, about what you were saying about maintaining that positive optimism in the modern day and age. As a younger person, one of the things that makes that challenging for me is my understanding of climate change and its potential impact on the global landscape.

And you talked a lot about human migration and integration, and I'm just curious, what is your take on how global climate change and rising sea levels, especially in a coastal, island country, how do you perceive that that might impact the future of human migration and conflict in your region?

JRH: Maybe on this, allow me to also make a comment in a most politically incorrect way.

We have an international conference, everyone from the Third World we all blame the West. If you do this you have more than 100 countries applauding. You have the Africans, Asians, along the line, everybody.

But let me say, of course we all know the role the industrialised countries played over 100 years, what they did. But I have said in speeches and in writing, "Well, that's true, but also we benefited from the development of science, of medicine. We live longer much thanks to the discoveries by Western scientists and medicine, before and after World War II."

If I'm from Asia or from Africa, I prefer to look at our own responsibilities. India, a country of 1.2 billion people, even if they were not having this current industrialisation - you know, really desperate to catch up. Of course they have done remarkably, but just the 1.2 billion people, every day, extracting water, sitting on the land, extracting from the land just to feed yourselves. Well, how much water is consumed in India, and how much water is poisoned or destroyed in India? And in China. And in Bangladesh. And in Indonesia. And in the Philippines. And in my own little country, Timor-Leste.

We are 1.3 million. You travel in my country, in the morning at least it looks very clean. Not because of our people. Not because of the so-called youth, the great future, you know, the new generation. Who do the most littering in my country? The young people. Of course, our government should have banned the import of plastic. I have been urging this for a long time. Hopefully with a new government one of the first actions that we will do is stop the import of non-reusable plastics.

Many of our people, as you drive on the roadside, you see them sitting there on the roadside with bundles of firewood, sitting there waiting for people to buy it. What is the easiest way to make money? You walk a few metres into the bush, cut the trees, nicely cut in pieces, and they sit on the roadside to sell firewood.

So we are responsible. Even my little country, we are responsible. When I was invited by Kofi Annan to give a speech in Geneva, before the Copenhagen Climate Change Convention in 2010. I did a closing speech. I was sitting and listen to the NGOs talking. Very valiant, you know, the NGOs from Asia. "We are going to achieve this, we are going to do that." And I told them, "Well, can you calm down, please? Let me tell you the following. There will be no agreement in Copenhagen, let me tell you now. Obama will not have the mandate from the US Senate." At the time Kevin Rudd, former prime minister of Australia, was a rising star on climate change, had just been dealt a blow also in the Australian Senate.

Then I asked people, "Where will the money come from for financing on adaptation, mitigation, all of that?" After the financial crisis, 2008/2009, the traditional ODA countries, countries that provide overseas development assistance, all of them, with two or three exceptions, significantly, obliterated the ODA. The UN had recommended for over 20 years, for each OECD country to increase their allocation of aid to 0.7 per cent of their GDP. That would amass enough money to improve education, water, sanitation, food security etc. in the

Third World. All these years, 25, 30 years, you know how many countries reach this target? Five. And they're all small ones. Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands. Now we have one great exception, UK, under David Cameron. When David Cameron was prime minister, he increased to 0.7. The only G7 country that increased ODA to 0.7%, even in the midst of a financial crisis in the UK.

So in my speech in Geneva I said, "Each of us in developing countries – let's stop always engaging in a blame game. Let's focus on our country." So I said, "In Timor-Leste, what should we be doing?" Well, when I was president in my country, every Friday from 8 in the morning to 11 in the morning, I mobilised all my staff in the presidency to clean up the beaches of Dili. And I told people "I am not doing this for the tourists. I am doing this for you, for your children, so that we have less malaria, less dengue, less cholera, less diarrhoea. So we spend less money on the medication in the hospital and this money can go more to education."

I mobilise people to plant trees. We plant thousands of trees. Not terribly successful. You know why? In one single day, one day, with the help of the minister of the government, I mobilised 30,000 students, we plant something like 40,000 trees around Dili. The only people who were happy were the pigs and goats.

It's a real problem for low-level countries. Kiribati I understand- I don't know whether it's confirmed- but Kiribati is already buying land in Fiji and elsewhere to transfer their people. They've got over 100,000 people in Kiribati, over the years they will transfer people there. Also the Maldives, they are looking at these contingency plans.

With the new president of the United States, this is a serious setback, after decades of negotiations. But fortunately the Europeans are together and challenging the US. And maybe, who knows, maybe the US Congress may be persuaded to challenge the US president on this.

QUESTION: I just wanted to know, you talked about the sort of amnesty, of not having a tribunal between Indonesia and Timor. What's your opinion on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal?

JRH: From my understanding, more than seven years and $250 million spent, and it's produced how many convictions? And the same happened with many other international tribunals. Not because the prosecutors and judges are not doing their job, but it is enormously complex.

In my own country, we rejected completely the notion, the pressure for an international tribunal. Partly, as I mentioned earlier, we understand Indonesia. Because for us, as I said many times in speeches, the greatest gift for us, the greatest act of justice that was done for Timor-Leste, is that today we are free. We were not freed on our own. We fought in many different ways, but we would not have been freed if it were not also for changes in Indonesia, when Indonesians students went to the streets and brought down the regime, which paved the way for dialogue and independence.

Also countries like, the US, they were an accomplice to Indonesia in 1975. But then in 1999, at that crucial time, Bill Clinton played a critical role. And actually the moment he took office in 1993 US policies began to change. If it were not for Bill Clinton in 1999, I don't know whether we would have that outcome. My point is, overall is that the international community that failed on Timor redeemed itself.

We also recognise many of our own people were involved in crimes; it's not only Indonesia. You know, during the civil war before independence, we didn't know of any Indonesian civilians that were killed, but among the Timorese, particularly in the first year or two, with rivalries and suspicion, many were killed. Those who did the killing, they are there in Timor, some, even in government, some even in the parliament. We know. So are we going just to have a special one for Indonesia? As Xanana himself once said, "Are we going to be that hypocritical and not start with ourselves? So who can judge who? So better to talk."

In the case of Cambodia, who am I to tell my brothers and sisters in Cambodia, particularly the victims, what would be the best. But I would say the following, that I have said a number of times:

Live on. Extricate yourself from the pain of the past. Do not allow yourself to continue to be a hostage of your own past, your own suffering, because you are not living. Find ways with help, as individuals, as communities, as societies, to live on. Honouring the victims, write and read histories so that no such tragedies of the past ever happen again. But don't allow yourself to be consumed by the suffering. You know, if you have lost people and you keep thinking about it every day, well, you lose all your creativity, your initiatives, you become numb, you become angry. So the perpetrators win again. They still dominate you.

So, that's my philosophy, and that's what I tell people, you know. Cambodia, for all of its imperfections, this country has come a long way. I'm told by friends here that criminality is very low, almost non-existent. Can you imagine this after so many years of violence.

That's remarkable that you have a country that went through this incredible violence that has been able to build such a peaceful society. And it's a tribute to Cambodians and a tribute to the government.

So my point is, first things first. If it can go together hand in hand, so much better. Along the way democracy will be perfected, justice will be perfected, But in the meantime l don't allow history to dominate you.

QUESTION: Your Excellency mentioned that you will be visiting to Myanmar in the next few days' time. What is your purpose of visiting there? That's all I wanted to know.

JRH: Myanmar, I'm not very, familiar with the details of the complexities of the problems there. It was great when Suu Kyi was finally released, and extraordinary expectations. It was an incredible international honeymoon with

Suu Kyi: the Lady is going to produce miracles. These miracles have not happened, at least as the liberals and everybody else abroad expected, and she has been under fire.

Let me tell you, remind you, Suu Kyi inherited a situation that was building up for 40 years. And many of us in the Third World inherit some of the European legacy. Frankly, in the past when I heard my African brothers blaming the Europeans, blaming the Berlin Conference, I said "God, the Berlin Conference happened in the 1800s. We are talking about the 21st century; they are still blaming the Berlin Conference."

When you are actually there and you look at the map of Africa- you had a bunch of people smoking cigars in Berlin carving up Africa. You look with curiosity, and you look at the map of Africa. You look at The Gambia, a little piece of territory squeezed inside Senegal. And English speaking, while the rest of it French speaking. Then you have Lesotho, a kingdom inside South Africa, completely landlocked. Not landlocked by four or five countries, but landlocked inside South Africa. And it goes on and on. Then you have the Gulf countries. Everywhere there was oil the British decided to have an independent kingdom there.

So, Myanmar has to deal with that colonial legacy, compounded by 40 years or 50 years of dictatorship.

I'm not going there on any fact-finding mission. I'm vice-president of the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council, made up of former Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers from the Asia region. Not everybody is part of it, but a large group. So we are going to Myanmar to meet with Suu Kyi and others to try to see whether there is any way we can help.

I also have a particular concern about the Rohingya situation. I understand, the roots, the complexity of it. But still, one million people, still human beings, wherever they may have come from. But with the context of the vast majority of the people who are very resistant to any accommodation or acceptance of Rohingya . That's the reality; you have to deal with that. No one can impose the Rohingya on the rest of the country. In the sense, telling the people, "You have to accept them and embrace them."

No, we have to find ways to educate the people, initiate the process that will be very long, so that in the end the Rohingya are welcomed like anyone else. To simply blame everything on Suu Kyi, well, just look at the constitution that was adopted 2008, where her powers are, who is in charge and who has more power. Even if she had more powers, I don't think she could do much at the moment. She has to be extraordinarily prudent, as she has been and because of that she has been criticised.

So, anyone who wants to help Burma, help Myanmar, has to understand this and really try to help her. She is the best hope for the people, for the country. She is the best hope for the Rohingyas. And that is a heavy responsibility.

A few years ago, 2006, we had a political crisis in my own country. It was not like a civil war, we had a breakdown of law and order, but people were traumatised by past violence when this situation happened. The Los Angeles Times came to Timor, they had a great reporter all the way from LA, he wrote a long feature on Timor, and he said "Ramos-Horta, the last hope of Timor-Leste".

God, when I read that title -- it was very sympathetic, but the situation was not one of lost hope, that I had become the last hope. That's when I felt a burden, "God, do I have this responsibility?"

So, can you imagine the pressure for Suu Kyi. Sometimes I wonder who she is with, who advises her, who is loyal to her. Myanmar is a country of 50 million people, my country is a bit over a million, and we are not doing a great job. We are doing reasonably well, but I am not in a position to judge.

So everything in perspective is relative. And that's why- maybe I didn't give a real great answer, but that's from the heart.