



**REPÚBLICA DEMOCRÁTICA DE TIMOR-LESTE**  
**SECRETARIA DE ESTADO PARA O APOIO E PROMOÇÃO SOCIO-ECONÓMICA DA MULHER**

Madam chair, distinguished members and experts of the CEDAW Committee, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor and privilege to represent the State of Timor-Leste in this session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. I would like to thank the Committee for giving the government of Timor-Leste the opportunity to present updates and milestones reached so far on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention in our country.

Madam chair, it is my pleasure to introduce members of our delegation from Timor-Leste who are participating in this important dialogue. I am Veneranda Lemos - Secretary of State for the Support and Socio-Economic Empowerment Promotion of Women, the national women machinery. Next to me is the ambassador of Timor-Leste to the permanent mission to the United Nations in Geneva: Excellency Marciano da Silva.

The rest of the delegation is comprised as follow:

Mrs. Josefa Alvares Pereira Soares – Member of the National Parliament

Mrs. Virginia Ana Belo – Member of the National Parliament

Mrs. Jacinta Correia da Costa Magistrate of the Dili district tribunal

A representative of the Ministry of Education

A representative of the Ministry of Interior

A representative of the Women's Machinery

Representatives of the Ministry of State Administration

A representative of the Ministry of Justice

Representatives of the Ministry of Social Solidarity

A representative of the Ministry of Health

A representative of the Vulnerable Person Unit from the Police

A representative of the Secretary of State for Employment policies and trainings

A representative of the Ministry of Agriculture

The presence of a high level and multidisciplinary delegation, representing various institutions of the government, including the judiciary and parliament, is indicative of profound and enduring commitment by government of Timor-Leste to CEDAW and further to the improvement of the adverse and precarious conditions of women in our country. The representatives of the different Ministries and Institutions demonstrate the strength that we draw upon while examining our commitments. Each member of the delegation is here today to respond to the questions of the distinguished members of the Committee and to take note of recommendations for better implementation in all Ministries, departments and institutions of government.

Madam Chair, Distinguished members of the CEDAW Committee,

Since the restoration of independence in 2002, Timor-Leste's social and economic policies have focused on alleviating poverty and inequality to address the immediate needs of our people. There are fundamental advances on gender equality that this young country has made in the past years. A significant step in Timor-Leste's commitment to gender equality was the ratification of CEDAW and its Optional Protocol without any reservations by the Parliament on the 16 April 2003.

Despite such a bold initiative, Timorese women still face numerous challenges due to a violent historical background, and tumultuous past marked with episodes of war. Indeed, our country is still very young and a post-conflict country. We are still in the process of building and consolidating our institutions, reforming our financial, legal and public service systems and developing human resources. Capacities still remain uneven and generally low, as generations did not have the opportunity to access education during the conflict.

The Government of Timor-Leste is committed to improving and safeguarding the lives of women to enable them to participate equally in all spheres of life. The Constitution gives the mandate for action on gender issues across all sectors of government. It calls not only for

equality between women and men in all areas of family, political, economic, social and cultural life (article 17), but also for non-discrimination on legitimate grounds, including gender (article 16). The merits of gender equality for the country's future is also articulated in our National Strategic Development Plan (SDP). This 20-year plan, designed based on a wider national consultative process, focuses on achieving gender equality goals.

Despite still being in the process of elaboration of our legal framework, the Government has integrated the protection of women's rights in a number of pieces of legislations:

The Penal Code enacted in 2009 is an important piece of legislation which criminalizes domestic violence and categorizes it as a public crime. The legislation is an overarching policy instrument that penalizes spousal maltreatment, along with family violence and abuse; rape and sexual assault; and other forms of gender-based violence including exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking.

The Law against Domestic Violence (LADV) was promulgated and enacted in 2010 and a National Action Plan (NAP) on Gender Based Violence (GBV) was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2012 (Resolution No. 21/2012). After 3 years of implementation, the evaluation of the plan, its evaluation is ongoing in collaboration between SEM, UN Women and UNFPA. Notwithstanding this achievement, what has remained remarkable was the enactment of the civil code in 2011 that upheld equality between women and men in terms of legal age for marriage. Previously, the legal age for marriage for women was 15 years and for men 18 years. Making the legal age for marriage equal for men and women, and increasing it from 15 to 17 for women is a significant milestone in the quest for Gender equality. This initiative demonstrates a practical model in which equality in terms of rights and responsibilities can be embraced within a marriage and family setting.

Our Labour Code, approved in December 2011, safeguards the equality principle and prohibits any kind of discrimination based on gender and further makes provisions for equality between men and women in terms of access to employment, work conditions and equal pay.

On the political side, Timor-Leste has one of the highest proportions of women parliamentarians in the world and has got the highest proportion in the Asia-Pacific region. In the July 2012 parliamentary elections, 38% of those elected to the National Parliament (NP) were women. This means that Timor-Leste has already surpassed the 2015 Millennium Development Goal of 35% female parliamentary representation. This achievement was partly made thanks to the amendment of the Law on Parliamentary Elections, which requires that one out of three political candidates be a women. At local level, the Law on Community Leaderships and their Election enacted in 2009 also comprises quotas for women within Village and Sub-Village councils. Leadership trainings and capacity building programmes have been conducted at the community level, particularly before each election with women being the primary beneficiaries. A new programme called “100% hau prontu” (100% I’m ready) is currently being rolled out in collaboration with two organizations from civil society in order to identify women potential candidates in view of the next local election in 2016. In this view, regional congresses in each municipality were held.

In regard to gender policy, the government of Timor-Leste is committed to the principle of equality between men and women and continues to strive to strengthen the mainstreaming of gender. In line with this commitment, the Government of TL approved a Government Resolution (No 27/2011) to establish an inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination mechanism within the Government institutions to ensure that gender perspective is integrated into policies, plans and budgets, at national and municipal level. The evaluation of the first years of implementation this mechanism will be evaluated next year. Another Government resolution on Gender Responsive Budgeting (N°12/2010) was also approved. Timor-Leste’s women’s machinery, the Secretary of State for the support and socio economic promotion of women, has an important role in coordinating these efforts.

Despite a number of remaining challenges, the positive impact of engendering the Annual Action Plans (AAP) is evident. Indeed, the monitoring and accountability mechanisms for implementation of CEDAW commitments have been strengthened through this mechanism. SEM in 2015, with UN Women’s support, analyzed 41 AAPs of different line ministries and secretaries of state, and provided recommendations on how best to incorporate gender perspectives and CEDAW Concluding Observations. Similarly, the comments provided by

SEM at the budget review committee, were a practical guidance to government institutions on integrating gender into specific sectors in compliance with CEDAW. As a result, 28 state institutions included Gender Equality activities in their 2015 Annual Action Plans. For instance, the Ministry of Justice included Women's Human Rights-based legal reviews for legal drafters in its AAP, and on a similar note, the Ministry of Education included an activity to provide transport for children to and from schools in 3 Municipalities, as recommended by the CEDAW committee.

Madam Chair, Members of the CEDAW Committee,

The commitment of the state, supported by an improved legal framework made possible further concrete positive developments as highlighted in the report.

Regarding Access to Justice, a number of improvements have been made in the last reporting period. Institutions such as the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) have been established across the country, Mobile Courts are reaching remote areas where people cannot physically access the current 4 tribunals, and the Ministry of Justice is working on Legal Literacy for citizens by disseminating citizen's rights in the municipalities through its National Directorate for Human Rights and Citizens. The Convention is now being directly invoked in courts by judges and justice actors. In addition, in view to enhance further the understanding by the judiciary of CEDAW, a comprehensive and specific module on CEDAW and women's rights has been already drafted and is awaiting implementation at the Legal Training Center. The Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights and Justice (PDHJ) also plays an integral role in receiving and filing complaints on Human Rights Violations and maladministration by state actors.

As per education, school enrollments have rapidly increased, out of the 90% of school-age children who enrolled in basic education in 2011, 48% were girls, according to the Ministry of Education's statistics. Enrollment at secondary, tertiary and technical education is also close to 50% for men and 50% women respectively.

The 'Bolsa da Mae' scheme, a grant system for vulnerable women headed households, was implemented in 13 municipalities and reached over 14,000 beneficiaries in 2012. Similarly, out of 658 scholarships designated for studies abroad between 2010 and 2013, 37% were meant for females. And finally, a national Literacy Campaign '*Sim Eu Posso*' targeting people aged 14 and older was conducted, hence resulted in 65% of graduates being women.

With Regards to health, we noted that the improvement in service delivery for maternal health has contributed significantly to a decline in infant and child mortality. Statistics from the Ministry of Health also show a slight positive trend in Family Planning with 26% of women using Family Planning methods in 2012 compared to 20% in 2010.

Madam Chair, Members of the CEDAW Committee,

The recently established VIth constitutional government, led by Dr. Rui de Araujo, is committed to Promoting Gender Equality and combating Domestic Violence as stated in the official programme of the government.

Under my lead, the Secretary of State for the Support and Socio-Economic Promotion of Women (SEM) previously the secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality (SEPI) will devote particular focus on the economic empowerment of women since the Government considers this issue a centerpiece for the empowerment of women in our country. Thus, as it is affirmed in the programme of our government, we are committed to "promoting initiatives that ensure more active participation of women in economic development, including access to credit, involvement in investment programs and participation within the productive sectors of the country."

With regards to the objective of accelerating women's economic empowerment, SEM has come up with a women's economic empowerment strategy for the following years, which will set the direction in which SEM will coordinate and provide technical assistance to line ministries working in the economic sector such as the Ministry of Agriculture and the Secretary of State for Employment policies and trainings.

More specifically in regard to Rural women, the recent celebration of the International Rural Women's Day in 2015 marked the start of a new cycle to support initiatives and put forward rural women, pro-actively promoting Gender Equality in all development sectors, through the adoption of the Maubisse Declaration signed by 11 institutions of the government of Timor-Leste, including the Prime Minister himself.

Despite of the advances made, there are still some challenges to overcome.

The representation and political participation of women at local level is still low, only 2% of women are sub-county and village chiefs, however, the ongoing process of decentralization and local governance reform is opening up new windows of opportunity at municipal level to make local level planning and budgeting responsive to the needs of women. Decentralization will also provide a chance for increased women's political participation by establishing quotas through the new legislation

Despite the existence of the Law Against Domestic Violence and the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence, high rates of prevalence of violence continue to abound, 38% of women in Timor-Leste have experienced some form of physical violence. Incest cases are unfortunately unexceptional, and low understanding and poor handling of gender based violence cases among justice actors poses a real challenge.

Early or forced marriages, teenage pregnancies and violence in schools have had a serious impact on school drop outs. As a result, the Government of Timor-Leste is taking significant measures to mitigate the problem by adopting a school re-entry policy for girls. Further to this, government seeks to strengthen its efforts to increase access to family planning programmes for families, with special focus on young women. In this regard, a "Zero Tolerance" policy was initiated in 2011 by the Ministry of Education and covers sexual violence, corporal punishment and other forms of violence in schools.

In the area of Reproductive Health, improving women's health, particularly reproductive health, is of urgent need. Although there is a positive trend, the fertility rates and maternal mortality rate are still very high. Thus, Maternal and Child Health are seen as national priorities in the National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2011-2030. In this view, the National

Reproductive Health Strategy was revised to become an umbrella Maternal/Newborn/Child Health Strategy. Infrastructure was prioritized and further improved with several maternity and health centers built around the country to reach more communities.

Collection and analysis of data is still an issue in Timor-Leste and needs serious attention. We still lack harmonized GBV data collection system between government, prosecutors and the courts. However, a couple of major gender statistical reports were conducted during this reporting period, such as a Gender Monograph in 2010 crafted from the 2010 Census, and the Country Gender Assessment from 2013 that was entirely done by SEM. Currently the government is conducting a new Census, and a gender analysis of the latest labour force survey is ongoing. These statistical reports have already been used and will continue to be used for an evidence based planning, and policy making.

As I conclude, may I assure you, madam chair of our commitment to work with the Committee, for the benefit of all women in our young country, and where we may have difficulties in addressing the various areas of the Convention such as the ones previously mentioned, we will seek your support and guidance.

We, the delegation of the State of Timor-Leste, are at your disposal for any further clarifications.

Thank you.