

Message to the Nation on F-FDTL

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PRESIDÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA GABINETE DO PRESIDENTE **MESSAGE TO THE NATION ON F-FDTL**

by H.E President Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão
Palace of Ashes, 23 March 2006

Dear compatriots,

I know that everyone expects me to say something about the situation, in F-FDTL which we all have followed closely. Some people say that the Supreme Commander only has the power during the time of threat or the time of war. These people are correct and somehow a bit incorrect because during the time of peace and order, the Supreme Commander is still undertaking a power to check the armed forces during the National holidays such as on 20 May and on the 28 November at the event held in Stadium Municipal Dili, where the Fire Brigades (Bombeiros) also were in line as security Force among the Civilian which contributes to the security for the State properties.

It is therefore, I am not going to use the power which I do not entitle to as the Supreme Commander. But I am rather going to speak only as the President of Republic of Timor-Leste. According to the Article 74 of our Constitution, stated "The President is the symbol and the guarantor of the unity of State, and the regular functioning of democratic institutions."

Through this role as the President of Republic that I will provide my observations on the problem occurring within F-FDTL so that everyone knows the roots of the problem, and whether there is a capacity to resolve these problems because so far the newspapers just mentioned each people's capacity. To say something on this problem, one has to be familiar with the roots of the problem,

before came up with his or her thoughts, otherwise some of us will say things baselessly.

Dear Compatriots,

First of all, I would like to explain that the decision taken by the Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak to consider 591 soldiers to be civilians is his real competence and it is not the President of Republic who is going to change it. It is indeed true, and I appeal to everyone not to be worried since the President of Republic is not someone who tries to remove other people's competency, and as the Supreme Commander [of F-FDTL], I will bow down to earth for this decision.

However, as the President of Republic I found that the decision taken by the Brigadier-General was incorrect, and it was not really just! As the President of Republic, I can say that my opinion may be more objective than that opinion of a foreign Legal Adviser working at the Council of Ministers, a foreigner whom the Brigadier-General listened more in making his decisions.

Even so, I wish to inform the five hundred and ninety one soldiers who are now become civilians that this is the decision that has been taken, and it means that you are no longer military men because I have to respect the decisions taken by your Leaders.

Dear Compatriots,

To all people, I would like to inform that the decision was incorrect since it tended to focus more on military discipline than to consider the background and the roots of the problem existed within F-FDTL.

On 11 January I received a petition signed by some military members of the 1st Battalion in Lospalos, presenting the issue of discrimination of "loromonu-lorosae" (people from the western and eastern part of Timor-Leste within F-FDTL). In the petition they stated that some Veterans usually said that "Only the people of eastern part of Timor-Leste are the independence fighters and not of the western part", and "if they, the veterans of the eastern part of Timor-Leste had not fought for independence, then people of western part would not be recruited as F-FDTL." With such discrimination, the promotions were only for the soldiers of eastern part [of Timor-Leste, and the discipline only goes for the soldiers of western part [of Timor-Leste].

I immediately sent a copy of the petition to the Minister of Defense and the Commander of Falintil-FDTL in order to request them to resolve the matter. On 17 January I received the response from the Commander of F-FDTL, Brigadier Taur Matan Ruak saying that since the 1st Battalion had just moved from Lospalos to Baucau, he is occupied but once settled, he would look into the matter.

The following day 6 February I heard that a large number of soldiers abandoned the barrack, and spreading throughout Dili. On 7 February I received some of them, and requested them all to mark their presence on 8 February in order to control them so that they would not be utilized by unwanted groups in creating problem and they could be blamed for it. All of them came to form in line in Caicoli, and they were around more than four hundred people. I requested Minister of Defense, Dr. Roque Rodrigues to be present, and he did come, but Brigadier-General refused to come, so we asked Colonel Lere instead. I also requested two Members of Parliament: Paulo Assis and Gregório Saldanha as members of the Superior Council of Defense and Security to be present.

I requested the Minister of Defense to carefully look into the problem by mentioning that the issue of 'Loromonu-Lorosa'e' was a political one and it was a problem which had long existed within F-FDTL, therefore there was a need to resolve it carefully. I also said that the matter was also found by the Investigation Commission in 2004, specially the words usually used by the Veteran Officers in

addressing the new soldiers, in particular those who are from Western part of Timor-Leste. Minister of Defense told me that he had no courage to speak with or to call attention towards Veterans because he had a complex related with the fact that he never be part of the war, therefore he really respect those Veterans. However, the Minister even said that sometimes the foreign Advisers working at F-FDTL were the one provoking this matter.

Colonel responded by saying that he did not believe the Veterans said such words, and he suspected the Political parties were behind it, particularly Democratic Party (PD) because Deker (former Veteran F-FDTL from western part of TL) had joint PD. I told them not to blame anyone with no basic reason, and saying that if more than four hundred soldiers abandoned the barrack, it perhaps something going wrong within the Institution itself. And better to correct our selves and improve it. As if we start to blame other people with no basic reason, it will show that we do not have the will or have no capacity to resolve the problem by putting it to other people's shoulder.

I request the two Leaders to carefully consider by re-accepting more than four hundred soldiers in order to resolve the matter accordingly. If they were to be sacks as a matter of final decision, it should be fair in order to avoid them not to bring the matter outside.

I asked the Minister of Defense to see that there should not be Veterans or Fighters inside F-FDTL as the State Institutions, there should not be, Veterans or non Veterans. The fighters should bear in mind that they were freedom Fighters or Heroes only up to August 1999, and today they are military members like any other. I also asked them to correct such behavior within F-FDTL since the Veterans should think that they are old, and they would be retired someday. Such behaviors might creating an environment where the new soldiers will be wondering when will the Veterans be retired, so that F-FDTL could become professional. And no more such thing like " I was one who suffered in the past, I was one who made the war, I was one who killed many enemies, and if we had not made the war, you would not have become F-FDTL members", etc. All organs of State have made a great effort to recognize the Veterans, freedom Fighters or Heroes, therefore the State Institutions will not allow any other status for the Heroes and the Fighters. Today, people who work within the Institution are all the servants of the State.

I also told the two Leaders to look first on the problem of discrimination between "loromonu-lorosae" to consider as a political issue which the State should pay attention to: and the other one is to do with promotion and discipline applied within military Institution, although this still has some relevance with the discrimination.

I also requested MP Paulo Assis and MP Gregório Saldanha to be part of the [Investigation] Commission but the Minster of Defense said its better not because it could undermine the competency of the Military's Chief of Staff. Then, I also agreed that the two MPs would just follow the investigation which the Military Chief of Staff was going to carry out as obsrvers. Therefore, it was not me who formed the Commission; I only requested the permission so that the two MPs could follow and observe the investigation which was undertaking.

The whole day I spoke to more than 400 persons, asking them to return to the barrack. And at the end they all returned in order to take part into the investigation. After one week, I learned that they went out again. On 22 January I received another petition complaining that instead, of looking at the substance of their petition, the Commission formed by the Chief of Staff of F-FDTL asked who organized them to make the petition and abandon the Headquarters. They also mentioned that they were threatened.

I receive information of the petitioners whom said that they wanted to become military members again, as they still respect their commanders, but the Veteran Commanders should correct

themselves not to practice discrimination of "Loromonu-Lorosae", the fighters or non-fighters.

Dear Compatriots,

I asked my Military Adviser to bring the petition to the Minister of Defense and the Brigadier-General who were about to board the plane to depart for China. The Brigadier-General angrily said, "if they want to fight, then let us fight." I also heard the same expression such as, "if one thousand people gone, another thousand will replace", the problem is considered to be too simple based on the Leaders' intelligent.

Dear all Compatriots,

Because of Lospalos's problem, in 2004 I formed one commission and F-FDTL also established one. The two Commissions worked separately but most of their report findings were similar:

There is lack of many laws and regulations; the Office of Secretary of State for Defense were promoted to be Ministry of Defense, but not many improvements in place, such as there is still no Code of Military Discipline, the Law of Military Service, and others. First, indiscipline started from the Commanders. Other issue is dealing with the promotion and treatment by commanders towards the new soldiers of western part of Timor.

In the end, those problems were not solved in good will; as such it continued to exist until 2006. Therefore, the background and the roots of the problem was not to do with indiscipline but mal-treatment carried out by some Veteran Commanders towards new soldiers and Timorese from western part.

I also told the two Leaders that dismissing these 400 soldiers is an easy thing to do. But my concern is: if we do not solve it properly, by just dismissing these people, then the young people from "Loromonu" will not apply for F-FDTL in the new recruitment process. If they are to join F-FDTL, within F-FDTL itself a bad atmosphere has being created because the Veteran Commanders, who we don't want to or fear to correct, will address to Loromonu soldiers by saying; "Are you coming to obey us or to against us like the previous ones?"

And all these will create an environment of military forces of F-FDTL that is only from Lorosae and other people, starting from Manatuto to Oecusse, were all militia's children, and they all did not know how to do war. The people is concerned with the new recruitment process as they will just recruit their connections, and the worst thing will be just recruiting the martial art groups which have joined some political parties.

The root of the problem was discrimination, not indiscipline. The 591 people [who were dismissed] show that we are not capable to solve the problems within the Institution, or that we do not want to solve it.

Many countries in the past, the Military just knew how to train and organize themselves to fight in the war. Nowadays, the military will not involve in politics, but they should know about politics, and they should have political sensibility.

I cried when speaking to the Defense Minister by saying, "the PNTL although does good things or not, there is a Minister who is responsible over their concern. Our Defense Force also needs to have someone to do so. After returning from China, the problem continued to be unsolved, and I admire to see that the Minister of Defense attending a workshop for a whole day, in discussing the quota for women in the upcoming Elections in 2007, the Minister of Defense has showed that for the Leaders the question of 500 Military members who left the Headquarter was not a problem, and the question

of Loromonu-Lorosae was not a problem either, and these problem had no any impact at all to our society because there was no impact to their brain.

I was admired, on my arrival yesterday at the Airport, there were a lot of Police officers providing security to me, as if the 591 petitioners were about to carry out demonstration against me or to kill me. I also admired that in my residence in Balibar, there has been an additional presence of Police officers, as if the fellow 591 [former soldiers] were about to assault me because I dismissed them. Minister of Defense and the Brigadier-General were the ones who suppose to be protected by such security because I did not need it. Sometimes, we try to intimidate the population in order to hide the problems which we do not have the courage to solve intelligently.

To end, I appeal to the petitioners to understand that as Supreme Commander [of F-FDTL], my mandate is just to check the soldiers on 20 May and 28 November. Therefore, if the Brigadier-General, after following the opinion of the legal adviser of the Council of Ministers, who had declared that you are now civilians, indeed you are already civilians. The Prime Minister has also said that there would be a new recruitment, so, be calm and look for other jobs. For the F-FDTL to be professional, it will take a long time, because our State has just begun with various sickness and various attitudes.

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