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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore (2 to 13 September 2024) – Welcome ceremony outside the Presidential Palace, Courtesy visit to the President of the Republic of Timor-Leste, and Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in the Presidential Palace

Welcome ceremony outside the Presidential Palace and Courtesy visit to the President of the Republic of Timor-Leste

This afternoon, the Holy Father Francis left the Apostolic Nunciature in Dili and transferred by car to the *Nicolau Lobato* Presidential Palace for the welcome ceremony in Timor-Leste and the courtesy visit to the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. José Manuel Ramos-Horta.

Upon arrival, the Pope was welcomed by the President of the Republic at the entrance of the Presidential Palace.

After the Guard of Honour, the execution of the anthems and the Honour of Flags, the presentation of the respective delegations took place. Twenty-nine children in traditional dress were present, three of whom offered the Pope flowers and the traditional scarf, the *tais*, before the presentation of the delegations. The Holy Father and the President of the Republic then proceeded to the hall where the private meeting took place, while the members of the Secretariat of State and the religious authorities met with the Prime Minister.

After the signing of the Book of Honour and the official photograph, a private meeting took place, followed by the presentation of the family.

Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in the Presidential Palace

At 18.55 (11.55 in Rome), in the Presidential Palace, the meeting with the political and religious authorities, the members of the diplomatic corps, businesspeople and representatives of civil society and the world of culture

was held.

During the introductory speech by the President of Timor-Leste, His Excellency Mr. José Manuel Ramos-Horta, the Holy Father Francis delivered his address.

At the end of the meeting, the exchange of gifts took place, followed by the official photograph with the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of Parliament and the President of the Supreme Court.

Finally, the Holy Father and the President transferred to the entrance of the Palace for the farewell. Pope Francis imparted a blessing to a group of approximately one thousand people, made up of employees of the President Palace with their respective families, gathered in the courtyard in front of the main entrance. After taking leave of the President of the Republic, the Pope returned by car to the Apostolic Nunciature.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father during the meeting with the authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps:

Address of the Holy Father

*Mr President,
Mr Prime Minister,
Distinguished members of the Government and Diplomatic Corps,
Your Eminence, dear brother Bishops,
Representatives of Civil Society,
Ladies and Gentlemen!*

I thank you for the kind and joyful welcome to this beautiful country of Timor-Leste. I am grateful to the President, Mr José Ramos-Horta, for his kind words of welcome.

In this place Asia and Oceania touch each other. In a certain sense, they also encounter Europe, which, though geographically distant, seems closer due to the role it has had in this area over the past five centuries – I do not want to talk about the Dutch pirates! Indeed, the first Dominican missionaries arrived here from Portugal in the sixteenth century, bringing with them the Catholic faith and the Portuguese language. Today, both Portuguese and *Tetum* are the two official languages of the country.

Christianity, born in Asia, arrived at these far reaches of the continent through European missionaries, testifying to its universal vocation and ability to harmonize with even the most diverse cultures, which find a new coalescence that is both higher and profound when encountering the Gospel. Christianity enculturates, it takes on the cultures and therein the various Eastern rites of the various peoples, for one of the important aspects of Christianity is the inculturation of the faith. At the same time, it evangelizes cultures. This binomial, inculturation of faith and evangelization of culture, is important for Christian life. It is not an ideological faith, but a faith rooted in culture.

This land is adorned with mountains, forests and plains, surrounded by a marvellous sea, from what I could see, so rich in many things, many fruits and wood. Yet this land has gone through *a painful period in the recent past*. It has experienced upheaval and violence, which often occur when a people looks toward full independence only to have its quest for autonomy denied or thwarted.

From 28 November 1975 until 20 May 2002, that is, from the date independence was declared until it was definitively restored, Timor-Leste endured its greatest suffering and trial. It suffered. The country, however, has been *able to rise* again, finding a path to peace and the beginning of a new phase of development, of improved living conditions and of appreciation on all levels of the unspoiled splendour of this land and its natural and

human resources.

We give thanks to God, since you never lost hope while going through such a dramatic period of your history, and after dark and difficult days, a dawn of peace and freedom has finally dawned.

Your *rootedness in the faith* has greatly helped in reaching these important goals. Saint John Paul II emphasized this during his Visit to your country. In his homily in Taçi-Tolu, he recalled that the Catholics of Timor-Leste have “a tradition in which family life, education and social customs are deeply rooted in the Gospel”, a tradition “imbued with the teachings and spirit of *the Beatitudes*,” a rich tradition of “humble trust in God, of mercy and forgiveness, and, when necessary, of patient suffering in time of trial” (12 October 1989). And translating this for today, I would say that you are a people that has suffered, but are wise through suffering.

In this regard, I wish in particular to recall and commend your assiduous efforts to achieve *full reconciliation with your brothers and sisters in Indonesia*, an attitude that found its first and purest source in the teachings of the Gospel. You remained firm in hope even amid affliction and, thanks to the character of your people and your faith, you have turned sorrow into joy! May the Lord grant that in other conflicts in various parts of the world the desire for peace will prevail, because unity is always superior to conflict; the peace of unity is always superior to conflict. This also requires a certain purification of memory, in order to heal wounds, to overcome hatred with reconciliation and confrontation with cooperation. It is good to speak of “the politics of the outstretched hand”, which is very wise rather than foolish, for when the outstretched hand senses betrayal, it knows how to resist, it knows how to move things forward.

Another praiseworthy event took place when, on the twentieth anniversary of the country’s independence, you incorporated as a national document the *Declaration on Human Fraternity*, and I am grateful for this, Mr President. I signed that *Declaration* together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi. You have done this so that – as the *Declaration* itself calls for – it can be adopted and included in school curricula. Indeed, this is fundamental.

At the same time, I urge you to continue with renewed confidence in the prudent establishment and consolidation of the institutions of your Republic, so that the citizens can feel that they are truly represented and that the institutions are properly equipped to serve the people of Timor-Leste.

Now, a new horizon has opened before you, cleared of dark clouds, but with new *challenges* to face and *new problems* to solve. That is why I want to say: may the faith, which has enlightened and sustained you in the past, continue to inspire your present and future: *Que a vossa fê seja a vossa cultura!* That is to say, may it inspire principles, projects and choices in conformity with the Gospel.

Of the various current issues, I think of the phenomenon of *emigration*, which is always an indication of an insufficient or inadequate appreciation of resources; as well as the difficulty to provide everyone with a job that offers a fair salary and guarantees families an income corresponding to their basic needs. And this is not always an external phenomenon. In Italy, for example, there is emigration from the south to the north and we have a whole region in the south that is becoming depopulated.

I think too of the *poverty* present in so many rural areas, and the subsequent need for collective and wide-ranging action involving manifold efforts and leaders from all sectors – civil, religious and social – to remedy it and to offer viable alternatives to emigration.

Moreover, I think of what can be considered *social scourges*, such as the excessive *use of alcohol* by young people. Please take good care of this; give young people ideals to get them out of these traps! There is also the phenomenon of joining certain gangs, which are trained in *martial arts*; but instead of using this knowledge in the service of the defenceless, they use it as an opportunity to showcase the fleeting and harmful power of violence. Let us not forget, too, that these children and adolescents have their dignity violated, a phenomenon that is emerging across the world. In response, we are all called to do everything possible to prevent every kind of abuse and guarantee a healthy and peaceful childhood for all young people.

In order to solve these problems, and to achieve the optimal management of the country's natural resources – primarily oil and gas reserves, which could offer unprecedented possibilities for development – it is essential to *prepare* properly and provide appropriate training to those who will be called upon to be the country's *leaders* in the not-too-distant future. I liked what the President told me about education here. They will then have at their disposal all the necessary tools to develop a far-reaching plan focused exclusively on the common good.

The Church offers her *social doctrine* as the foundation for such a formative process. It constitutes an indispensable and trustworthy pillar on which to build various approaches and for verifying whether they truly favour integral development or are instead obstacles, producing unacceptable inequalities and a large number of people who are discarded or left on the margins. The Church's social doctrine is not an ideology, instead it is based on fraternity. It is a doctrine that must promote; it promotes the development of peoples, especially the poorest.

Nevertheless, while there is no shortage of problems – as is the case with every people in every age – I invite you to remain confident and to keep a *hopeful gaze* toward the future. There is one thing that I would like to tell you: it was not in my address, but it is very close to my heart. This is a beautiful country, but what is the best thing this country has? Its people. Take good care of your people, love your people, help this people grow. It is a wonderful people, wonderful! In the few hours since my arrival, I have seen how the people express themselves, your people express themselves with dignity and with joy. It is a joyful people.

You are a *young people*. I am not referring to your culture and history, which are rather ancient, but to the fact that about sixty-five percent of Timor-Leste's population is under the age of thirty. I think of two countries in Europe where the average age is forty-six and forty-eight. Yet among you, sixty-five percent are under thirty years old, so we can think that the average age will be around thirty, or a little less. This is a richness. This statistic tells us that the first area for you to invest in is education. I am pleased about what I heard from the President, about what you are achieving. Keep moving forwards. I think there are already several universities, maybe even too many of them; there are several secondary schools, whereas perhaps twenty years ago there were not. This is a very high rate of growth. Invest, then, in education, in education within the family and education at school, in an education that puts children and young people at the centre and promotes their dignity. I was pleased to see the children smiling, with those white teeth! There were children from everywhere. The enthusiasm, freshness, forward-looking perspective, courage and resourcefulness, all typical of the young, combined with the experience and *wisdom of the elderly*, form a providential mixture of knowledge and a great impetus toward the future. And here, I would like to give a piece of advice: bring children and grandparents together. The encounter between children and grandparents brings about wisdom. Please reflect on that. Together, youthful enthusiasm and wisdom are a great resource that do not allow for passivity, still less for pessimism.

The Catholic Church, her social doctrine, institutions that provide assistance and charity to the needy and educational and health care institutions are at the service of all and are also a valuable resource, enabling everyone to look to the future with confidence and hope. In this regard, recognition should be given to the fact that the Church's commitment to the common good can rely on the cooperation and support of the State, within the framework of the cordial relations that have developed between the Holy See and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, and reflected in the Agreement between the Parties that entered into force on 3 March 2016. Excellent relations.

Timor-Leste, which has been able to face times of great tribulation with patient determination and heroism, thrives today as a peaceful and democratic country, committed to building a fraternal society and developing peaceful relations with its neighbours in the international community. Looking at your recent past, and at what has been accomplished so far, there is reason to be confident that your nation will likewise be able to face intelligently, clearly and creatively the difficulties and problems of today. Please trust in the wisdom of the people. The people have their wisdom; trust in that wisdom.

I entrust Timor-Leste and all its people to the protection of the Immaculate Conception, heavenly Patroness

invoked under the title of *Virgem de Aitara*. May she accompany you and help you always in your mission to build a free, democratic, united and joyful country where no one feels excluded and everyone can live in peace and dignity. *Deus abençoe Timor-Leste! Maromak haraik bênção ba Timor-Lorosa'e!*
