

# 'A lesson in humanity'

**Report by Adelino Gomes on the CAVR Hearing on Internal Political Conflict, Dili, 15-18 December 2003**

*Adelino Gomes, Portugal's leading journalist on East Timorese affairs, covered the CAVR Hearing on internal political conflict for his newspaper, the authoritative Lisbon daily 'Publico'. In the following deeply sensitive account of his personal reaction to the Hearing, given to an audience in Lisbon, Gomes describes five key 'moments' in the 4-day hearing. The Hearing, he writes, 'was the most magnificent point, in human terms, that I had witnessed in the history of Timor-Leste'. He concludes by lamenting the lack of international coverage of the event observing that 'The whole world, once again, was distracted when the Timorese were giving it a lesson in humanity'.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Professor Barbedo Magalhães asked me to come here and to relate the days of reconciliation that I myself witnessed in Dili, between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of December last.

I accepted his invitation because I was surprised, and, I must confess, indignant, to discover upon my return to Portugal that none of the means of public information in Portugal and Europe had referred to what had happened in Dili in those days which, I think, were historic in character.

I have recorded four symbolic moments of these four days. But now wish to add a fifth, prompted by the presence here of His Excellency, the Ambassador of Australia, and I will commence with this. I refer to the touching testimony of the Australian former Consul to East Timor, Mr. Jim Dunn, which honoured his country and its history in regard to the Timorese. Coming from a country that was not always on the correct side, the words of the ex-Consul represented the best of Australia in relation to Timor-Leste.

The first moment (to the foreigners present in this room please forgive me) is Portuguese and it has to do with the moment when the last governor, Lemos Pires, emerged on the huge screen, set up in front of the stage, not only explaining, but also assuming the responsibilities of the Portuguese. It was a moment of great dignity that I regret not being shown in Portugal – for inexplicable reasons, from my point of view, which I will refer to at the end of this testimony.

Second: the painful moments when Rogério Lobato narrated the assault that he had committed against a prisoner, then paused and said, 'I assume responsibility for the violations of human rights between the 20<sup>th</sup> of August and the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1975'. Silence. 'But I was also a victim'. Another long pause then he shed tears as he recalled memories of his father, of his mother, his brothers and sisters, his nieces and nephews, 17 direct family members who were all killed as a consequence of the civil war and the subsequent Indonesian invasion. It is the human side, it is always the human side, which gives more strength and courage to forgive. 'Those who killed my mother are still alive. I will not take revenge. I will not cause justice by my own hand. But please do not ask me to shake their hands'.

Third: those initial minutes during the intervention of João Carrascalão. He leaves behind the drifting idea he had a few days prior to the hearing that he may not show up, knowing full well that his absence would undermine this reconciliation encounter. Carrascalão stands up, makes his way to the stage, swears to tell the truth and begins his speech more or less in these terms: 'Until now the truth has not been said. I was wrong. Because it was I that commenced it, it was I that made the mistake. If you want to point the finger, point it at me'.

The fourth moment, the following day: Mari Alkatiri had already accepted responsibility on behalf of Fretilin (saying: 'Fretilin assumes part of the negative process'); Xavier de Amaral had already seemed to blame (though his statement was confusing) the central committee for the execution of Maggiolo Gouveia and dozens of other Timorese leaders who were all rivals of Fretilin; Mari Alkatiri had already again assumed responsibility, but in the terms that were, if I may say so, somewhat facile: everyone was at fault and therefore we were too; Lu-Olo had already spoken for a good 40 minutes, recounting the course of the guerrilla war, exceeding his time limit. You could feel the expectation in the air. If Lu-Olo, the President of Fretilin does not assume party responsibility, all the other, sometimes even dramatic moments, would be in vain.

Fretilin and UDT were two rival brother parties. They both tortured, they both killed in cold blood. The organizers and above all, the people, do not seem to be demanding exact accountability from them. However, for reconciliation to be an initiative with substance and not a mere ritual let alone hypocritical, it is necessary that both parties, through those most responsible at the time or their successors, clearly assume responsibility relating to the death of others or of their own members.

Lu-Olo comences the last of his last sentences . He says: 'Brothers and sisters, we were separated after the coalition [of April 1975, which flowed into the civil war] and now we meet further on. UDT killed Fretilin people. Fretilin killed UDT people. Fretilin killed Fretilin. As the President, I ask the forgiveness of the families of all the victims'.

A fifth moment (a moment full of moments): Alkatiri and Lu-Olo walk down from the stage and make their way back to their seats; João Carrascalão stands up and walks towards them and right there, in front of everyone, including Xanana and Rogério who were in the front seats, he extends his arms to Alkatiri and hugs him firmly. I cannot swear to it, but it is possible that Mari's feet may not have reached the floor at that time; you could only see his profile squashed against João's large chest and then against Xanana's chest; Xanana stands up and so does Rogério. For the first moments the celebration is only between them, those of Fretilin and those of UDT from the 1975 period. But a minute or two later, the others are there as well, those of the Trabalhista party and those of the Apodeti and Kota parties.

So were the widows. The widows of those killed in combat and also the widows of those repressed by blind radicalism and labeled with epithets of traitors and for this very reason they were there, standing in front of Xanana and asking him for restoration of their dignity, in order for their loved ones to finally rest in peace.

There still remains the surprise of Xanana's speech. It was one of the most beautiful that I have ever heard in my life. Not due to the things that he said but because of the manner in which he said them and by the circumstances under which he said them, looking everywhere to see if he was able to distract his tears among the deep felt silence of all present.

I do not know what the Timorese felt. But I, who had become a friend of these men and women – these men and these women who had more illusions and dreams than I have had – felt during those moments that this was the most magnificent point, in human terms, that I had witnessed in the history of Timor-Leste. This coming on top of the grandeur of the independence celebrations in Tacitolo; the grandeur of that morning in Oslo when Dom Carlos and José Ramos -Horta – who carried with them the fight of the guerrillas and of the people in the cities – were acclaimed by the Nobel committee; and the grandeur of those very long years of struggle by thousands of anonymous men and women against Indonesian repression and incomprehension by Indonesia and her allies, and the forgetfulness and the silence of the rest of the world, including Portugal.

I felt something vague that only became clear to me later which is why I did not include it in the report I sent to my newspaper but which I will now recount for you. This is that this was the moment in which that generation could make its farewell whilst being the protagonist of their history. A

glorious farewell because they died and killed, because they never betrayed, because they conquered, against everything and against all, including themselves, and gave the best gift that anyone could ever give to their people to whom it rightfully belongs: their national independence.

I felt that the only thing that was not achieved (and this is probably the last challenge that this history imposes) because maybe the situation is not ready, was for them to receive the acknowledgment they deserve. Xanana was conscious of this when he addressed the youth directly, asking them for their patience because their time would come, but at the same time appealing to them to learn that violence is not the way to go.

With all this said and presenting my respect and tribute to all those brave ones who had the courage to conquer the peace amongst the people, please allow me to end by making a lament. Because more than one month has passed and nobody has mentioned a single word about this matter, I want to lament why such an event does not deserve a line or only a one second image in the Portuguese and foreign media. The only exception being the newspaper for which I work and the Australian newspapers who buy the articles from the journalist, Jill Jolliffe. The reason is not, and cannot be, because she and I are, maybe, the only living survivors of the international coverage of the 1975 civil war.

I believe that the whole world, once again, was distracted when the Timorese were giving it, as well as all of us, a lesson in humanity.

Adelino Gomes  
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*Adelino Gomes report on Dec 03 public hearing on internal political conflict*