

Comments to political parties forum on Chega!

Pat Walsh, STP-CAVR, 31 May 2007

1. Thank you for coming. We realise that the election campaign has started and that you are busy and under a lot of pressure. We appreciate your interest and hope that today's meeting is helpful in your campaign.
2. Many people fear politics and political parties because they associate politics with violence and conflict. This has been Timor's experience in the past. It is up to political parties to prove them wrong and re-build trust in politics by being models of best practice. This can be done by having very clear and strict rules on violence, constructive policies for the common good, good open management of the party organisation and its finances and by giving the community a positive experience of consultation and interaction. The CAVR report Chega! has 8 recommendations (9.1-9.8) intended to help parties rebuild the good name of politics in Timor-Leste. These recommendations include a suggestion that parties should take strong disciplinary measures against any party member who ferments violence.
3. I don't agree with those who fear political parties. Political parties are essential organisations in a democracy. For this reason in 2000 I wrote a directory of Timorese political parties to promote political parties, to make them better known and to dispel misinformation about them.. This directory has recently been updated by the Australian Labor Party. I suggest you check what it says about each of your parties and give your feedback to the ALP so the directory can be further updated.
4. According to the ALP directory, only two Parties have policies that address the central issue in the CAVR Report Chega! regarding what is to be done about past violence in Timor-Leste. If this information is correct, it means that 12 Timorese political parties have nothing to say about crimes committed before 1999. I make this point because, in our experience, the fate of Chega! is a live political issue in the community. The Post-CAVR Technical Secretariat distributed 100s of copies of Chega! and held seminars right across Timor-Leste over the last few months. The community are therefore very aware of Chega! and appreciative of CAVR's work. They also told us in the seminars and workshops that they are disappointed that the government and Parliament have not yet addressed Chega! and its recommendations. They also feel hurt because they contributed to the development of Chega! and feel that their contribution is being ignored. They made it clear they want to see Chega! debated by the Parliament. Having said that I would like to emphasise that, when he was Prime Minister, President Ramos-Horta publicly endorsed CAVR and Chega! on several occasions and committed himself to implementing as many of its recommendations as possible.
5. I am reporting this feedback from STP-CAVR's dissemination program to assist your campaign. I believe people will raise the issue of Chega! during your visits to the districts and public rallies and that it is in your interest to have read the report and be in a position to respond clearly and knowledgeably to the issues the community will raise. Copies of the Executive Summary of

Chega! are available in Tetum, Portuguese, English and Indonesian. You are welcome to pick one up today if you haven't already got one.

6. Four final short points:
 - STP-CAVR is conducting a mini-survey to assess how many in the community have copies of Chega! and have studied it personally and in their organisations. We would be most grateful if you could fill in this survey today and leave it with us.
 - Chega! has over 200 recommendations. Many of them relate to current issues in Timor-Leste. Political parties are very welcome to adopt any of these recommendations as their policy.
 - STP-CAVR is ready to assist your party with Chega! We realise it is a long and complex document. Please let us know if you would like us to make a presentation on Chega! to your party candidates, your staff or your members. You are very welcome to contact us through our Executive Director, Rev Agostinho de Vasconcelos or the Coordinator of our Socialisation Team, Jaimito da Costa.
 - Lastly, what we would most like to hear from you today is a public commitment that, if you are elected on June 30, you will urge the Parliament to give priority to Chega! when it sits again on September 15. I would add that we believe Chega! should be debated in its own right, not as part of a larger packet. The staff of the Post-CAVR Technical Secretariat are ready to work with members of Parliament and staff of Parliament to facilitate that process.

Thank you.