

LAUNCH OF CHEGA!

Isabel Guterres, Parliament House, Canberra 28 November 2006

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to address you today in the halls of Australia's national parliament. The report we are launching today, *Chega!*, owes a lot to the generous funding provided to CAVR by the Australian Government and is testimony to the high priority Australia places on promoting human rights and ending the scandal of impunity. As a former CAVR Commissioner, I wish to thank the Government and each of you in your various capacities for your vision and the financial and other assistance that made this report possible. I also acknowledge with immense respect and appreciation the individual contribution made to CAVR and this report by a number of talented Australians who were my colleagues. Having said that, however, I very much hope the partnership will continue and that you will help us see the process through to completion. Although CAVR has been dissolved, this report is not the end of the road but the beginning of a new stage, the urgency of which has been painfully brought home to us by the crisis in Dili this year.

In these brief remarks, I want to focus on the relevance of *Chega!* to the contemporary situation in Timor-Leste. This means that it will not be possible on this occasion to address other important aspects of the Report such as the regrettable role of major stakeholders, including successive Australian Governments, in upholding the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination for most of our struggle, and the related issue of responsibility for crimes against humanity committed 1975-1999. These and other important issues feature prominently in *Chega!* and should not be ignored. I hope that it will be possible for the Parliament to debate the Report in due course and the lessons to be learned from its contents and findings. These include, in CAVR's view, the importance of the United Nations to world order and the irreplaceable role of civil society organizations as watchdogs and advocates of human rights.

In his video message to this launch, Prime Minister Ramos-Horta praised CAVR's contribution to the building of our new nation. He believes that, if studied and implemented, the report can make a long-term contribution to the building of a stable, non-violent society in Timor-Leste based on accountability, rule of law and respect for human rights. I completely agree with him. We did not write this report to dwell on the past for its own sake but to learn from it. Our motivation in documenting the truth was entirely positive and forward-looking. We believed that transparency is essential to nation-building particularly in Timor-Leste but also in our important neighbour Indonesia whose continuing democratisation and reform will serve both the human rights of its citizens, such as those in troubled Papua, and the long-term interests of Timor-Leste. Seminars on *Chega!* will be held in Indonesia early next year. I am also pleased to tell you that an Indonesian edition of *Chega!* will be published in Jakarta next year and that Indonesia's National Women's Human Rights Commission – Komnas Perempuan – plans to publish the section of sexual violence and related recommendations in Indonesia.

Chega! has nothing to say directly about the events of this year because CAVR was mandated to report only on the period 1974-1999 and was dissolved in December last year. Indirectly, however, the report throws some light on our current problems. It provides ample evidence that Timor experienced significant divisions at all levels during its struggle for independence and it documents the terror and displacement that ordinary people repeatedly experienced in recent memory. Anyone reading the report, therefore, will quickly understand why the people are easily traumatised and reluctant to leave their refugee camps and why divisions have appeared amongst our leaders. It is also clear from the report that Timor-Leste was exposed for many years to a culture of violence and impunity that was the institutionalised norm. It is deeply distressing to me, and indeed to most of my countrymen and women, that some Timorese remain addicted to violence and treat the law and law enforcement agencies with contempt. But perhaps we were naïve to think that the few short years since independence would be enough to exorcise these particular evils. I should also note that the Report does not include any reference to East-West divisions (this issue never came up during our 4 years of inquiry) and does not support the claim made in some quarters that parts of Timor suffered more than others during the war. On the contrary, the evidence collected by CAVR shows that all East Timorese, regardless of their ethnic origin or where they were born, suffered both fatal and non-fatal violations across the country, although at different times.

Chega's key contribution to preventing a recurrence of our current problems is to be found, however, in its recommendations. Though all the recommendations in *Chega!* should be fully considered, including the call for the UN to debate the report, some are particularly urgent now, a point that our President and Prime Minister have both emphasised. They are not quick fixes but long-term measures based on lessons learned, not from the latest how-to manual on good governance, but from Timor-Leste's own school of hard knocks. They warn about the dangers posed by the proliferation of security agencies and violence, impunity, marginalised urban young men and ineffective institutions; they spell out ideas to ensure the neutrality of the police and military, security of person, and ways to embed a culture of accountability, non-violence, human rights and rule of law. The relevance of these issues will be immediately apparent to anyone who has followed our fortunes this year.

The challenge now is to get these recommendations acted on. It would be tragic for Timor and a waste if they were ignored but they have not yet been debated by the Parliament in Timor-Leste or internationally. Prime Minister Ramos-Horta's undertaking is very encouraging but it would assist further if donors like Australia who funded the report also made it clear that the job should be finished. It would also help if Australia could assist with the practical implementation of the recommendations including through financial assistance to the Post-CAVR Technical Secretariat. The long-term systemic and systematic program of implementation that is needed will undoubtedly benefit from Australian support and expertise.

In conclusion, may I thank you again for honouring us with this launch. I am confident that, with your continuing support, this report, like CAVR itself, can contribute significantly to nation-building in Timor-Leste and the sea-change this requires.