



**REPÚBLICA DEMOCRÁTICA DE TIMOR-LESTE
MINISTRO COORDENADOR DE ASSUNTOS ECONÓMICOS**

High-level Conference on WTO/ASEAN Accession of Timor-Leste
Dili, 12th July 2022,
Salão Nobre, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

H.E. Mr. Joaquim Amaral
Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs
Chief Negotiator for Timor-Leste Accession to the WTO

WELCOME/OPENING REMARKS
(Morning session)

His Excellency the President of the Republic, Dr. José Ramos-Horta;
His Excellency the Prime Minister, *General* Taur Matan Ruak;
Excellencies, Members of the WTO Inter-ministerial Commission.
His Excellency the Chairperson of Timor-Leste's accession Working Party,
Ambassador Rui Macieira;
Excellencies, Ambassadors and Representatives of International Agencies,
Esteemed Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director of the Accessions Division of the
WTO, and Madame Anna Varyanik, Secretary of Timor-Leste's accession
Working Party

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

First of all, I would like to extend my greetings to your excellencies and to the distinguished participants in today's high-level conference on Timor-Leste's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Community of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

I would like to thank specially His Excellency the President of the Republic and His Excellency the Prime Minister for participating in this event and for the unconditional and continuous support given to these processes.

On behalf of the Government, I would like to thank, especially, Ambassador Rui Macieira, Ms. Maika Oshikawa and Ms. Anna Varyanik, who have made a very long journey from Geneva to be here with us today.

Also, on behalf of the Government, I would like to thank your excellencies Mr. Trần Tuấn Anh, Mr. Sun Chantol and Ms. Khemmani Pholsena, who are here today virtually. I am very grateful to you for sharing with us the experiences and lessons-learned of your countries during the processes of accession to the ASEAN and the WTO.

I would also like to thank the members of the WTO Inter-Ministerial Commission for their efforts to make these processes succeed.

Finally, I may thank my team, for their relentless dedication, and the rest of the line ministries and national institutions involved in the organization of this event.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you here today. The organization of this conference shows the commitment of Timor-Leste to do "*whatever it takes*" to join the Community of ASEAN and to become active competitors in the international trade of goods and services as full members of the World Trade Organization.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In line with the previous constitutional governments, for the VIII (eighth) Constitutional Government, membership in ASEAN and WTO are “*Matters of the State*”. We consider both processes to be intertwined and essential for the success of our vision of Timor-Leste as a modern and diversified economy with high-quality infrastructures and a growing, healthy, and well-educated middle class by 2030.

The world is at a difficult crossroads, facing unexpected challenges as the COVID-19 Pandemic and other conflicts that we thought were buried since the past century. Timor-Leste, even if a safe and stable country in solid economic growth shares these challenges, while facing others. We believe that making of Timor-Leste a very active player in the globalized world of the 21st century is key to tackle these challenges and thrive. To this end, joining the WTO and the Community of ASEAN is essential.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The World Trade Organization, as the bedrock of international trade, is composed of 160 members and 20 acceding countries representing 98% (ninety-eight per cent) of the world trade. For Timor-Leste, becoming a member is fundamental to unleash the potential of its economy in several sectors. Trade is an engine for development, and Timor-Leste has a huge potential that is yet to be exploited. As a full member, we will be able to diversify our economy and bring about more cross-border business opportunities. We will be able to improve our general economic growth and hence the general quality of life of our People. We will be better suited to attract foreign investors and our companies will have better opportunities to grow and expand beyond our borders.

It has been a long way since 2015, when Timor-Leste submitted its application to become a member of the WTO. Today, seven years later and even with the backlash of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I am proud to say that our determination and hard work has given results. If we succeed in our plans, we will be the fastest accession process in the history of the WTO.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the end of the XIX (nineteenth) century, John Hay, a US Secretary of State, wrote that the Mediterranean was the ocean of the past, the Atlantic, the ocean of the present, and the Pacific, the ocean of the future. This is the future, and the ASEAN is at the core of it.

The ASEAN region is one of the most dynamic regions in the world, with more than 620 million citizens and a GDP well beyond US\$3 TRILLION US dollars. Becoming members of the ASEAN, by far our biggest trade and investment partner, will allow us to deepen our commercial links within ASEAN region. The free trade agreements that the organization has concluded and continues to negotiate have placed ASEAN at the core of global economic activity and will grant Timor-Leste enhanced access to regional and world markets, opening new opportunities for Timorese products and services.

As a part of the ASEAN family, Timor-Leste will contribute to the peace and stability of the region while reinforcing its own strategic independence and sovereignty. As full members of the organization, we will strengthen our relevance in the politics of Southeast Asia, and we will be able to better protect our national interests. Acceding to ASEAN and linking us with its agreements and institutions will be a valuable platform for engagement in the region's challenges, including fight against climate change and coordination on disaster management.

It has been a long way since Timor-Leste applied for membership in 2011. Observers since 2002, in 2005 we became members of the ASEAN Regional Forum, and in 2007 we adhered to the Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship in Southeast Asia.

We have taken several measures to further enhance the process such as the creation of an inter-ministerial technical working group, which has given rise to a vibrant and productive whole-of-Government working program. We have been very active in all ASEAN related fora, and we have promoted presential and virtual "fact-finding missions" carried out by the ASEAN Secretariat within the three ASEAN pillars. We are ready to host, as soon as

next week, a new mission to evaluate, on the field, our readiness to join ASEAN under the Economic Pillar.

The breadth and depth of our efforts to join the Organization are unprecedented and we are confident that we will be part of the ASEAN family in the very next future.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The accession of Timor-Leste to the ASEAN and the WTO is of the paramount importance for us but it will have sound benefits for the ASEAN region and important commercial opportunities for the WTO members.

Strategically well-located, Timor-Leste is a natural gateway between ASEAN, Oceania and the Pacific and has the potential to be an economic and political bridge between ASEAN the other members of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), a community of nine countries home to some 270 million people spread along four continents.

Also, as founding members of the g7+, we already co-chair the g7+ group at the WTO, and we expect that our membership to ASEAN will create synergies between the g7+ members and the members of the ASEAN Community.

Timor-Leste is fully committed to accept the principles of international trade contained in the WTO-related agreement and shares the values and purposes of ASEAN. Even if the youngest democracy in Asia, we are considered as champions of Democracy and Human Rights in the region, according to the 2022 Democracy Index Report.

Our commercial appeal is based in the fact that Timor-Leste is a country with strategic energetic reserves, a petroleum fund currently valued over US\$19 billion US dollars, and a fast-growing and largely untapped market for goods and services. Timor-Leste will constitute a new market with important opportunities to other WTO members and, especially to the countries in the region.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To cope with the challenges of the accession processes to ASEAN and WTO, Timor-Leste has largely adapted and improved its legal frameworks and updated and increased the technical readiness of its national institutions.

In a short period of time, we have managed to regulate unregulated sectors and to adapt others to comply with ASEAN and WTO guidelines. We are in the process of improving the capacities of our Public Institutions and we have introduced a great number of measures to improve our business enabling environment while trying to increase the readiness of our private sector to make it able to compete in a more international and liberal environment.

I hope that you will agree with me if I say that, regardless of the outcome, the reforms within the processes of accession, together with others initiated by the Government, are laying the foundations for Timor-Leste to be among the most developed countries in the region.

We are aware that this journey is long and will continue well beyond our accession to the WTO and the ASEAN. We are sure that, if we continue down this path, we will be able to realize the aspirations of the Timorese People to create a prosperous and strong Nation. A Nation that will be able to defend our interests and to guarantee the prosperity and well-being of our population in today's complex and rapidly changing world.

Before finishing my intervention, on behalf of my whole team, I would like to express my gratitude to His Excellencies the President of the Republic and the Prime-Minister for the confidence and trust deposited in us. We will continue making as many efforts as necessary to make a reality that Timor-Leste becomes part of the Community of ASEAN and an active member of the World Trade Organization.

I would also like to thank all participants, in advance, for their contributions to this session, that I am sure will be a great success.

Thank you very much.