

Strengthening Democracy in Timor-Leste

Addressing the sensitive subject of individual and party interests overriding the national interest

Timor-Leste is one of the world's newest states and amongst the poorest in Asia. ([UN Development Report 2011](#)). Nine years after independence, many Timorese are yet to experience the full benefits of democracy and feel out of touch with the democratization process.

Political crises and cyclical violence continue. Timorese youth feel disenfranchised, rural communities marginalized and there is little public trust in law enforcement institutions. Public accountability is weak and the country is confronted by widespread corruption amid allegations of Government maladministration.

In a [report](#) from their Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, UNDP confirms the ongoing challenges faced by Timorese in the post-independence period:

"...countries, such as ... Timor-Leste, are recovering from decades of prolonged conflict and are encountering the twin challenges of rebuilding their economies and political structures at the same time. These states face the additional challenge of delivering on the promise of democracy and peace dividends despite their fragile institutions."
(<http://www.undp.org/asia/pdf/DevResults2010.pdf>)

Recognizing the fragility of peace and its future challenges, Timorese are taking every opportunity to move their country forward from post conflict reconstruction to sustainable peace in the consolidation of democracy.

As one Timorese citizen remarked:

"We have come out from a long and huge process of resisting the occupation; we have come with the idealism of thinking that independence is the final process when in fact we have just begun a new process with its own challenges."

Tomorrow, Friday 25 November 2011, Interpeace local partner, the Centre of Studies for Peace and Development (CEPAD), will hold a 'National Forum' in Dili to present the findings of their latest nationwide research project which involved close to 400 people across Timor-Leste's 13 districts.

The report and Forum will examine the issue of the *promotion of individual and party interests over the national interest*. This is one of the key issues seen by Timorese as standing in the way of consolidating democracy and sustainable peace in Timor-Leste. The findings of the research and potential solutions will be presented at the Forum for endorsement by key stakeholders prior to taking the solutions forward to the Government and other relevant institutions for enactment into policy.

Results from the countrywide research indicated that:

- There is confusion around the concept of democracy in Timor-Leste;
- Transparency and accountability in Government are seen to be lacking;
- There is an apparent absence of institutional "checks and balances"; and
- Impunity and political elitism is seen to inhibit the consolidation of democracy.

Looking at constructive solutions, CEPAD and participants in the research programme came up with two recommendations to address these issues:

'A permanent civic education campaign'

This initiative is designed to address the perceived lack of moral and civic responsibility in Timor-Leste and to promote active and responsible citizenship. *“The goal is to develop and promote civic responsibility,”* explains João Boavida, Executive Director of CEPAD. *“By implementing such a civic education initiative, we will be able to encourage responsible citizenship with the knowledge and skills to support and respect democratic rules and norms,”* he continued.

‘An Independent Society of Ethics’

The second recommendation is for the establishment of an ‘Independent Society of Ethics.’ This will provide citizens with the opportunity to discuss and put forward community issues across all governance structures in the promotion of active and engaged citizenship. In conjunction with the first recommendation, it is anticipated that this initiative will facilitate and build trust between the Government and its people.

“... This recommendation is very important ... to help develop this country. Important because to-date, the Government has established various commissions...but there is not yet a positive progress in place,” stated one of the participants in an earlier consultation in the Aileu district.

Participants at the National Forum on Friday will discuss the feasibility and credibility of the recommendations. The next step will be a follow-up with the Government of Timor-Leste on how best to implement the proposals.

João Boavida explains: *“This is one of four essential areas Timorese believe must be addressed for peace in Timor to last. By bringing the collective interest to the forefront, we will be taking a major step forward in the consolidation of democracy.”*

A Timorese national himself, Boavida then explains why this, and other solutions, owned and designed by Timorese will work: *“Our solutions are made by us, so they work for us. Our work would not be possible without the energy, enthusiasm, and ideas of Timorese from all walks of life and from all districts across the country. Typical of our approach, these two proposals stem from the needs and solutions Timorese across the country have identified for themselves.”*

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About the initiative

The Programme of Research and Dialogue for Peace (PRDP) is a joint initiative between CEPAD and Interpeace.

The first phase of the programme enabled Timorese to collectively identify four priority issues crucial to the development and democratization process in Timor-Leste:

1. The promotion of individual and party interests over the national interest;
2. The need for a common narrative of the history of the resistance and the occupation;
3. The ineffective formal judicial system and the culture of impunity; and
4. Corruption, Collusion and Nepotism (KKN).

See the full report here: <http://www.interpeace.org/index.php/programmes/timor-leste>.

This second stage of the programme to tackle each priority issue individually has been made possible with the support of the Finnish Government, Global Development Group, German development



agency, MISEREOR, and The Charitable Foundation, as part of their ongoing commitment to enable Timorese to build sustainable peace in Timor-Leste.

About CEPAD

The Centre of Studies for Peace and Development (CEPAD) is a Timorese NGO that was established in 2007 in response to the violent political crisis of 2006. It uses collaborative research and dialogue engagement to advance the understanding and address conflict-related issues and the major challenges to democracy in Timor-Leste.

Timorese national, **João Boavida**, is the Executive Director of CEPAD. The CEPAD team has extensive experience in engaging with local communities and key stakeholders since 2007 as a means to address the question of how to overcome conflict and build sustainable peace in Timor-Leste.

The CEPAD board is made up of respected individuals from different sectors of society, as well as representatives from each of the four sovereign bodies which form the state of Timor-Leste; namely, the Parliament, Government, Presidency and the Supreme Court.

CEPAD works in partnership with Interpeace, an international peacebuilding organization.

About Interpeace

www.interpeace.org

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Interpeace is an international peacebuilding organization headquartered in Switzerland with programmes in 16 conflict-affected countries. It was created by the United Nations in 1994 to work with societies divided by violent conflict to build sustainable peace. It became independent in 2000 and today has an innovative operational partnership with the UN.

Interpeace currently supports peacebuilding programmes in Burundi, Cyprus, Guinea-Bissau, Israel, Liberia, Palestine, Rwanda, the Somali Region, Timor-Leste and on Youth Violence Prevention in Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Belize), and has a thematic programme on post conflict constitution-making.