



FRENTE REVOLUCIONÁRIA DO TIMOR-LESTE INDEPENDENTE
FRETILIN

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MEDIA RELEASE

FRETILIN HEADQUARTERS ATTACK: PARTY LEADER CONDEMNS POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Dili, Monday, 2 October

Yesterday morning, as reported by Dili Fire Brigade, a fire was set at FRETILIN headquarters in Comoro. Before it could be extinguished, one of the buildings on the FRETILIN block, a small café area was destroyed. The fire also damaged some of the adjoining offices.

In a brief statement in Dili this morning, FRETILIN's Deputy Secretary General, Jose Manuel Da Silva Fernandes, condemned the attackers as enemies of democracy.

“For thirty years, FRETILIN has been a leading force in the fight for independence and democracy,” said Mr. Fernandes. “Our party was the elected choice of the majority of voters in the national elections in 2001, and the local elections in 2005. Those who attack our supporters and our facilities are trying to prevent us from preparing for the next election.

Mr Fernandes continued: “This is a deliberate strategy. They attack our leaders, they attack our government, and now they attack our Party's infrastructure. This pattern of events has been going on now for six months, since April. We call on all the institutions, national and international, who are responsible for security, to work together to bring this political violence to an immediate end.”

“It is time to speak the truth about the violence. It is not violence of west against east, or east against west. It is violence directed largely against FRETILIN,” said Mr Fernandes”

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Background Information

(provided by Timor Leste Democracy Support Network, Australia):

Cormoro, on the western side of the town on the road to the airport has been one of the main flash points for violence. Many FRETILIN supporters and militants in this area have already been driven from their homes into the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Dili, which now house 70,000 people. Others have moved out of the city into the twelve rural districts, where 80% of the population lives, and which have so far been free of violence, with only one or two exceptions. Over 108,000 people are now registered as IDPs in the districts. According to party officials, in normal circumstances, FRETILIN's many hundreds of supporters in the Comoro area would be able to prevent such attacks, or at least report and act on them immediately. Now they cannot. They also claim that many of these attacks are by people who have come into Dili from other districts in recent months, and are not known to locals. This makes their identification and apprehension more difficult.

Last weekend, gangs of rock throwing youths attacked FRETILIN headquarters, driving away a small number of FRETILIN youth on security. The previous night, there was a break-in, and a computer hard drive stolen. On both occasions, the international forces had to be called, but no one has been apprehended for these attacks. This morning, they were called again, and so was the fire brigade. Neither arrived in time to prevent the damage. By then, FRETILIN supporters extinguished the fires before they arrived, while the arsonists had disappeared long before.

The continued lack of security seriously affects FRETILIN's ability to communicate with its militants and supporters and prepare for the next election. Senior FRETILIN officials, including several members of the Council of Ministers, have had their houses attacked and burned and are living in overcrowded conditions with friends. Many FRETILIN leaders regularly receive threats to their lives and those of their family via text messages. The President of the Party, who is also the President of the Parliament, has to be provided with Close Personal Protection (CPP) by Malaysian forces. The Secretary General, Mari Alkatiri, has to live under similar protection at his house, from the Australian forces, and rarely goes out. The lack of security obstructs the work of FRETILIN committees and sub committees, including its youth organization and the committee responsible for its magazine and bulletin, and the committee preparing the electoral campaign. This is an extraordinary situation for a party which has huge popular support in the districts, and in Dili itself. In the Dili district at the local elections last September, FRETILIN candidates won 94% of the positions. The party also holds the majority of seats in the national parliament.

Without basic security, the ability of the party and its leaders and supporters to engage in democratic political processes to resolve the current crisis is seriously impeded. Despite these conditions, FRETILIN is continuing with the process it calls 'consolidation' following on from the Party Congress in May. For example, on Saturday, in the village of Ostico, in the District of Baucau, nearly 200 militants and sympathisers took part in a dialogue with members of their party who are in the government.

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