



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

Government of Timor-Leste

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government solves rice shortage and warns against hoarding

The government of Timor-Leste (East Timor) has already begun distributing imported rice in Dili and outlying districts and threatened to prosecute hoarders seeking to artificially increase prices.

The World Food Program has lent 800 tonnes of rice to the government. Three hundred tonnes of rice has been sold to the cooperatives and rural retailers and the remaining 500 tonnes will soon be made available for sale. The rice is being sold at US\$2 per 5kg and the government will be required to replenish the rice stocks of the World Food Program once it has sufficient reserves of rice.

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Estanislau Da Silva, said the government expected to receive rice shipments later this week and next week.

Mr Da Silva said the government is investigating whether any private businesses have been hoarding rice in order to artificially increase the price.

"If any businesses are found to be engaging in such practices, appropriate action will be taken through the judicial system," Mr Da Silva said. The National Parliament is also carrying out an investigation.

Mr Da Silva also rejected accusations by a Dili Catholic priest, Father Domingos Soares "Maubere" that the Government has been hoarding rice and selling it to supporters of the ruling party FRETILIN. Father Domingos Soares "Maubere" is a well-known opponent of the government who led anti-government demonstrations in 2005.

"This completely false and ridiculous allegation from a member of the Church is irresponsible and may serve to further destabilise the already volatile security situation," he said.

"As a member of FRETILIN, I have not bought any rice from the Government nor do FRETILIN members receive preferential treatment in respect of rice distribution. In my office, I have received people from all opposition political parties to discuss solutions to the apparent rice shortage. If anybody has any concerns they should contact my ministry directly to clarify any issues," Mr Da Silva said.

He said that while there appeared to be a shortage of rice there was no overall food shortage in Timor - Leste, with sufficient reserves of potatoes, cassava and maize to feed the population.

"People who claim that Timor-Leste is experiencing starvation are spreading misinformation about the

current situation in an attempt to score political points without regard to the fact that their comments are misleading and destabilizing,” he said.

“The government took strict measures after the ransacking of the rice warehouses during the 2006 crisis to ensure that there was no food shortage in Timor-Leste.”

“Let’s not forget that the Timorese Government has been distributing rice to internally displaced people and other vulnerable people at no cost and is purchasing more rice to continue the feeding program. The government also has put in place mother and child feeding programs as well as school feeding programs”, da Silva said.

“The rice shortage is actually a region wide issue with Indonesia and the Philippines also experiencing similar problems. However, we expect that Thailand and Vietnam will harvest their rice in the next month or so which will help to alleviate the supply concerns around the region, including in Timor-Leste.”

For further comment: Carmen da Cruz, +6707274156.

Carmen da Cruz is the Director of Social Services in the Ministry of Labour and Community Reinsertion