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**Attention: International Affairs Reporter
Chief of Staff**

Health workers rise to challenge of social crisis in Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste's Community Health Centres and local health posts remained fully operational from April 29 when the first internally displaced people appeared in the capital Dili, until today when over 148,000 people rely on health workers organised through the Ministry of Health. In Dili with 69,000 people in 57 IDP centres, the Dili District Health Service at first provided mobile health clinics, then set up 24 hour health posts in 19 centres, each with doctors and nurses.

Health Ministry staff continued to work despite many of them also having to live in IDP centres because of threats to their homes. Since June 17, the case load at the IDP centres has declined and the service is now reverting to mobile clinics, with 24-hour posts continuing for the two largest IDP centres.

The health sector is one of Timor-Leste's many success stories, because it has succeeded in providing a basic level of service to all the people of the country, even in remote locations, and it is improving the quality and availability of these services. In the public sector, these midwife, nurse, GP and hospital visits, medicines and educational programs are free - a primary reason why all people in this very poor country can use them.

Rui Maria de Araújo, a Timorese doctor who trained in Bali and then worked as a support surgeon at Dili Hospital, was head of the Health Department under the UN administration up to May 20, 2002, and then the Health Minister in the first independent government. He says that success has been about being able to spend the available money effectively. "The issue has not been money, but having good health policies and good methods of implementation so that we achieve our targets," he said.

Under the first National Health Policy Framework developed under UNTAET, the health sector has a focus on primary health care to help cure the most common diseases, to prevent illness and to provide community education. "We deliver our services through programs aimed at mothers and children, tuberculosis, malaria and HIV / Aids. The point of contact for people is a Community Health Centre in each Sub-District, or a Health Post in population centres isolated from the Community Health Centre," said Minister Araújo.

Each of the 65 Community Health Centres has 6 – 10 nurses or midwives, and 1 – 2 general practice doctors. Each of the 175 Health Posts has one nurse and / or one midwife.

The Health Ministry and its 13 District Health Management Teams is fully managed by Timorese, and employs 1,700 people. However, there are only 55 trained Timorese doctors and under a formal aid program the Cuban government provides 220 Cuban doctors and 30 Cuban health technicians. Several of the Cuban doctors are teachers at the National Institute of Health.

Training doctors, nurses and technicians at the National Institute of Health is a major priority to ensure that availability and quality of health services continues to improve. A one-year Nursing Diploma course is now provided in exchange for a three-year contract to work in a remote Health Post. "With our expanded budget next year, we will really improve facilities, equipment and communications at our Community Health Centres and Health Posts, and thus retain our staff and really improve our services," concluded Minister Araújo.

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