

## Francisco Guterres Lu Olo for President

“I shall be a President of all and for all”

Media release

4 May 2007



## Female literacy must be a priority, says Lu Olo

Teaching women to read and write is a proven way of reducing infant mortality and improving the health of women and children, FRETILN presidential candidate Francisco Guterres Lu Olo said today.

Lu Olo said he would establish a women's unit in the Office of the President to help reinforce female literacy and other needs of women on the national development agenda.

“Investment in female literacy will make a major contribution to the health and well-being of current and future generations of Timorese,” Lu Olo said.

“Literacy is not just about reading and writing, but about empowering women to assert themselves politically and economically. It is also generally agreed that literate women are less likely to be victims of domestic violence, which is a major problem in all post-conflict societies.”

Lu Olo continued: “The women of Timor-Leste hold a special place in our society. Not only are they the centre of the family and vital members of the workforce, especially in the rural farming economy but also they bore the brunt of the violence during the Indonesian military occupation of our nation. Women actively participated in the resistance in a decisive way by taking up arms, forming the backbone of the clandestine movement and working tirelessly on the diplomatic front.”

Lu Olo said he fought alongside many courageous women during his 24 years in the resistance army FALANTIL. “I know from first hand experience the sacrifices women made for our nation's independence. It is our duty now to ensure that all women – our wives, mothers, sisters and daughters –are respected and treated as equals.”

Lu Olo said promoting gender equality and women's rights requires much more than simply writing provisions in the Constitution and enacting laws to establish equality with men.

“Improving the literacy rate is an essential beginning. There must be a clear focus on developing policies and strategies which increase women's participation in the workforce, provides opportunities for them to further their education, improve their health indicators and empower women with the skills and support to become key decision makers in our society and share equally in the benefits of Independence.

“I will build on the many achievements of the FRETILIN Government and the hard work of civil society organisations since 2001. The needs and goals of Timorese women, young and old will be a focus of my work as your president during the next five years. I will set up a women's unit as a mechanism to ensure the voices of all women are at the top of the national agenda.”

### Basic Social indicator data:

The adult illiteracy rate in Timor-Leste is estimated to be 46% nationally. For women, the rate is 52%, but rises to 90% in some remote regions. Timor-Leste also has the highest fertility rate in the world sitting at 7.8 children per woman of child bearing age. However, 42- 80 per 10,000 women die giving birth.

Infant mortality, meaning deaths before age one, is at 88 per 1000 live births and 128 per 1000 children die under the age of five. 45% of children under the age of 5 are also underweight.

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