

## Francisco Guterres Lu Olo for President

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

Media release

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## ISF troops disrupt two FRETILIN rallies

ISF troops have disrupted two peaceful FRETILIN mass meetings in the final week of East Timor’s presidential election campaign.

Jose Manuel Fernandes, representative of FRETILIN backed presidential candidate Francisco Guterres Lu Olo said today Australian-led International Stabilisation Force (ISF) operations disrupted L’Olo’s “dialogue with the people” in Dili yesterday (May 5) and his rally at Ainaro south of Dili on Thursday May 3.

“The ISF military behaved in a heavy-handed and intimidatory way towards our supporters,” Fernandes said.

“Timor Leste is a sovereign country, no longer under foreign military occupation, and the ISF should not be frightening and intimidating an entirely peaceful election gathering.”

Fernandes said yesterday’s ISF security operation in Dili, supposedly at the request of the United Nations police force UNPOL, involved major use of helicopters, heavy armoured vehicles and armed troops which intimidated people seeking to attend his dialogue at Borja da Costa Park in the suburb of Farol.

“The ISF and UNPOL have no right to interfere with the legitimate political activities of the Timorese people,” he said.

He said Lu’Olo’s opponent Jose Ramos Horta had boasted of his close relationship with Australian Prime Minister Howard during the campaign, seeking to make it an election issue.

“Whether intended or not, the actions of the troops have compromised the Australian military’s public assertions of neutrality in this election,” Fernandes said.

“At Ainaro on Thursday, while Lu’Olo was addressing the rally, a helicopter landed very close to the crowd and armed soldiers in full combat rig moved among the crowd.”

Fretilin General Secretary Mari Alkatiri sent a written protest about the Ainaro incident to the Australian military commander Brigadier Mal Rerden.

Alkatiri wrote: "We have been told that the ISF action was in response to a request from UNPOL to provide security. We ask, whose security is being provided for by such threatening behaviour? Certainly not the security of our members and supporters, who, on the contrary, have good reason to believe that this was an attempt to challenge their right to assembly under our Constitution."

Alkatiri's letter continued: "I do not need to remind you that this election is occurring in highly sensitive circumstances, in which the maintenance of neutrality and the appearance of neutrality by the ISF is of the utmost importance. The FRETILIN candidate has publicly criticised our opponent for attempting to use the ISF inappropriately in the campaign, when he said he would call off the action against Reinado. We expect the ISF to maintain neutrality, and we will publicly defend their right and their duty not to be drawn into a political campaign. Our Constitution is clear on the need for the armed forces to remain free of political interference."

In reply Brigadier Rerden said he would "endeavour in future to alter helicopter flights so that they do not inadvertently coincide with Mr Lu Olo's rallies." He denied that troops entered the rally and mixed with the crowd.

However video footage which will be available at Lu Olo's news conference today clearly shows troops among the crowd.

Fernandes said Fretilin received daily complaints from its supporters of harassment and intimidation by ISF troops.

"We are not convinced that there is no connection between the troops' behavior and the Australian government's apparent support for Jose Ramos Horta," Fernandes said.

He pointed to a classified Australian Defence Force minute, published in Australia's *Bulletin* magazine on June 6 2006, which stated: "Australia's strategic interests can also be protected and pursued more effectively if Australia maintains some degree of influence over East Timor's decision-making."

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