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Lu Olo wins first round against all odds

Fretilin candidate Francisco Guterres Lu Olo has won the first round of Timor-Leste's (East Timor) presidential election – a result the party welcomed today (Thursday) as “a victory against all odds.”

Lu Olo's official election representative, Jose Manuel Fernandes said: “Fretilin believes that despite not obtaining an absolute majority this is a victory for Lu Olo against all odds. This is because there were seven other candidates vying to become President with some of them openly supported by President Xanana Gusmao and certain members of the hierarchy of the church.”

With counting completed, it is clear that none of the candidates received more than 50% of the votes required to win outright. Lu Olo has polled first with 28.79%, Jose Ramos Horta is second with 22.6% and Fernando de Araujo Lasama is third with 18.52%.

“Lu Olo has received more than 103,000 votes including more than 10,000 votes in Dili where, contrary to media reports, he is in second place,” said Fernandes, the deputy secretary general of the party.

A second round of voting will now take place in May 2007. Lu Olo will contest the second round with Ramos Horta.

Fernandes said: “We accept the result and respect the choice of the people. Now the people will have another opportunity to vote and the second round will be a clear choice between two candidates.”

Fernandes said Fretilin will pursue its complaints about irregularities with the National Electoral Commission (CNE) and added that the party respects the right of every candidate to do the same.

“However, we wonder why the other candidates are only now complaining about the election. When Lu Olo was not in the top two they did not raise a single issue. Now that he has a clear lead they have made a joint complaint,” he said.

“Fretilin completely supports the resolution of complaints through the legal system. All irregularities should be dealt with in accordance with the law and due process. This is an important part of developing a democracy and an opportunity to educate the electorate.”

Fernandes repeated Fretilin's April 5 call for the CNE to remove Martinho Gusmao as spokesperson for the commission after he publicly endorsed a presidential candidate.

“The CNE failed to remove him and since then he has repeatedly made statements prejudicial to Fretilin and to the independence and neutrality of the CNE,” Fernandes said.

“In the interests of nurturing democracy and justice in this country, we again call on the CNE to remove Gusmao as its spokesperson and for the Church to replace him as their representative on the CNE. He is a national embarrassment.”

Fernandes also repeated Fretilin's condemnation of outgoing President Xanana Gusmao and Prime Minister Ramos Horta for abusing their positions of state on the eve of the election when they blatantly attempted to promote Ramos Horta's bid to become president.

Gusmao, Ramos Horta and Dili Bishop Alberto Ricardo da Silva appeared together on TVTL television to deliver "an Easter message" on Good Friday.

"As a presidential candidate Ramos Horta should not have given a nationally televised 'Message from the Prime Minister' three days before the election on 9 April (Monday). The program was structured to give the impression that Gusmao and the Church endorsed Ramos Horta's presidential campaign," Fernandes said.

Fernandes said the election result disproved the claim promoted by political opportunists and parroted by sections of the international media that Timor-Leste was divided along East/West lines.

"The people did not vote along East/West lines," Fernandes said. "It is true that Lu Olo received strong support from the districts of Lautem, Baucau and Viqueque which are in the east. However, Lu Olo also was strongly supported in the districts of Covalima, Oecussi, Same and Ermera which are in the west.

"We urge everyone not to promote division within our society."

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