



Vote for FRETILIN!

2007 Parliamentary Elections

“Defending Timor-Leste’s independence”

Media release

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FRETILIN vows to defend constitution and separation of powers

FRETILIN today vowed to strongly defend the constitution of Timor Leste (East Timor) against opposition parties’ proposals to erode the separation of powers between the parliament, the president, the government and the judiciary.

FRETILIN President Francisco Guterres Lu Olo said separation of powers was essential to prevent one group or person achieving dominance with the ability to thwart the will of the electorate.

Lu Olo was responding to opposition parties’ statements that they would move to amend the constitution to give the president of the republic more and wider executive powers.

“FRETILIN will oppose giving any more constitutional power to any one group or constitutional body,” Lu Olo said. “We want the balance and distribution of power to stay as it is in the constitution. It protects us all against the excesses of any one individual. I argued strongly in favour of this when I was the presidential candidate and continue to do so.”

He said the separation of powers as currently defined provides essential checks and balances necessary for a young democracy. “They are the sort of checks and balances many countries would like to have,” Lu Olo said.

He said that the constitution had withstood its greatest test by being able to provide guidelines to help Timor-Leste move from the political and constitutional crisis which began in May 2006, to the point where it has been able to hold two rounds of free and democratic presidential elections and now the election to renew the mandates of parliament and the government.

“Throughout the crisis, FRETILIN became the target of unconstitutional attacks on its government and parliament by the former president. However, we continued to defend the constitution and insisted that the parliament and government could only be changed democratically and constitutionally. We are proud of our stand in that we managed to avoid our nation spiraling into the abyss of unconstitutional coups where the constitution would have been trampled beyond recognition,” added Lu Olo.

“The separation of powers entrenched in our constitution resulted in each organ of the constitution seeking a compromise to move beyond the crisis. This was more desirable, consensus-based and democratic than having a sole powerful president or prime minister or even parliament determining the outcome.

“We need to protect this proven mechanism. FRETILIN will strongly resist any attempts by any party to erode these checks and balances,” said Lu Olo.

Lu Olo said the independence of the judiciary also needs to be protected.

“The independence of judicial officers recently came under attack but FRETILIN and civil society were able to spark public debate that successfully repelled the attacks. The independence of the judiciary has recently been strengthened by the reappointment of the Chief Justice who has been widely applauded for his professionalism and independence in the midst of the crisis.

“Our constitution was developed over a lengthy period of wide public debate and discussion. All members of the Constituent Assembly signed it into existence. The voters have a right to know if the parties they are voting for will defend our constitution.

“I urge Timorese to vote for FRETILIN to protect our constitution. I ask the other parties to let the voters know where they stand on this issue. Do they stand for a system which distributes power and includes participation in decision making, or do they want to concentrate power in the hands of one person who can dictate their will?” said Lu Olo.

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