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2007 Parliamentary Elections

“Defending Timor-Leste’s independence”

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Literacy and primary health care campaigns vital for women

Campaigns to promote literacy and primary health care in Timor -Leste (East Timor) are vital elements of the FRETILIN government’s drive for greater female participation in the economic, social and political life of the nation, according to FRETILIN parliamentary candidate and current Vice Minister for Education and Culture, Ilda da Conceicao.

Ms da Conceicao, a former a guerrilla fighter and organiser of the Popular Organisation for Timorese Women (OPMT) continued:

“This is why FRETILIN will fund scholarships and incentive payments to assist women and young girls to complete their education from primary school all the way to tertiary institutions,” she said.

“Women are one of the three main groups we are targeting in our National Literacy Campaign, not only as participants but also as literacy tutors. It is well known that when women learn to read and write there is a big improvement in their confidence and they are more likely to assert themselves politically and economically.

“Improvements in literacy also reduce infant mortality and improve the overall health of women and children.”

Ms da Conceicao said the FRETILIN government has also focused primary health care on improving the health of mothers and children and improving reproductive health practices.

“Timor-Leste has the highest fertility rate in the world –7.8 children per woman of child bearing age – and between 42- 80 per 10,000 women die giving birth. A combination of primary health care and education can help reduce these figures.”

She acknowledged that FRETILIN still has more to do to promote women’s rights.

“Some of our opponents have criticised FRETILIN for not passing domestic violence legislation. However, we are preparing this legislation to include in the new penal code, which is a long and difficult process. Timor-Leste has a developing justice sector and its inability to deal effectively with domestic violence is a legacy of this.

“FRETILIN knows better than any party that women are the victims of war, and that violence against women continues when the conflict stops.

“FRETILIN has promoted women’s rights and gender equality since its formation in 1974. It pioneered the women’s rights movement in Timor-Leste and established OPMT in 1975, the first Timorese women’s organisation,” she said. “FRETILIN promoted women’s rights during the resistance and the struggle continues up to the present. The FRETILIN government set up the vulnerable persons unit in the PNTL (police force) which combats crime against women and children.

“We must all redouble our efforts to change community attitudes. It is the duty of men to work together with women on this. We call on all political parties to make a commitment to campaign against violence against women. We must demand the highest standards of our own political leaders, who must set an example.”

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