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Opposition’s decentralisation policy a recipe for waste and corruption

Opposition party policies to decentralise government are a recipe for wastage, inefficiency and corruption, Timor-Leste’s (East Timor’s) majority party FRETILIN said today.

Minister for State Administration Ana Pessoa, a FRETILIN parliamentary candidate said opposition policies reveal a poor understanding of the complex institutional issues involved in devolving power and financial responsibility to local governments.

“To decentralize power it is first necessary to ensure that local governments have the proper institutions and people with the right technical skills. These elements must be in place to avoid wastage, inefficiency and corruption,” Ms Pessoa said.

She said the FRETILIN government completed a three-year study of options for decentralization. Based on the findings of the study, the FRETILIN government plans to create municipalities as the basis of local government reform.

“Our study on decentralisation was completed after broad based consultation with local communities, including suco (administrative level) chiefs, suco councils and public servants,” she said.

“After reviewing the study, the FRETILIN government decided to run pilot programs in four districts: Bobonaro west of Dili, Lautem east of Dili, Aileu south of Dili and Manatuto east of Dili.

“We will learn practical lessons about decentralisation through these pilot programs. We can then proceed to set up municipalities throughout Timor-Leste, each with its own capital as the administrative centre. The aim is to create between 30 and 35 municipalities throughout the country by 2015.”

Ms Pessoa, a former provincial judge in Mozambique and experienced civil law jurist, added the FRETILIN government has already started devolving responsibility on a small scale. She pointed to the Community Development Fund launched by the Ministry of Agriculture in May this year. Under this program each of Timor-Leste’s 442 sucos receives \$10,000 USD from the government to spend on community projects. She said local communities were also taking responsibility for various small-scale water and power projects around the country.

Ms Pessoa said: “The devolving of real power to local government is a new experience for our people. Decentralisation needs to be phased in over the coming years so that mistakes are minimized and real benefits flow to the grassroots.”

For more information, please contact:

Ana Pessoa (+670) 723 0014

www.timortruth.com, www.fretilin-rdtl.blogspot.com