

PRESS RELEASE

Timor-Leste opens ASEAN National Secretariat to intensify its preparations to join ASEAN

ASEAN Secretariat, 2 February 2009

Timor-Leste last Thursday launched its “ASEAN National Secretariat” as a special step to intensify its preparations for the ASEAN membership.

President Dr Jose Ramos-Horta presided over the launch ceremony held at the newly-built Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao, National Parliament President Fernando Lasama de Araujo, Foreign Minister Dr Zacarias Albano da Costa, Secretary General Imron Cotan of Indonesia’s Department of Foreign Affairs, and members of the diplomatic corps in Dili and Timor-Leste Members of Parliament attended the ceremony.

In his address, President Ramos-Horta said that he had received reassurances of support for Timor-Leste’s eventual admission into ASEAN during his recent state visits to Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia.

He said Timor-Leste’s ties to Southeast Asia and ASEAN are based on three factors: geography, desire of the people, and clear government policy. “We wish to join ASEAN in the possible shortest time,” he emphasized.

“We know the burden of proof of our readiness is on us,” he added.

He pointed out that with the launch of the “Secretariat”, Timor-Leste will continue to do its best to develop its human resources and show its seriousness and responsibility towards regional cooperation and diplomacy.

Foreign Minister Dr Albano da Costa said Timor-Leste shares the dream of ASEAN’s Founding Fathers about peace, security and prosperity in Southeast Asia. “Timor-Leste is eager to contribute to making this dream come true,” he said.

Assistance of ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners

He requested ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners to further assist the “Secretariat” in training Timor-Leste officials. The “Secretariat”, located on the beach-front prime location and included an IT training centre, was built with financial assistance from the Republic of Korea, one of ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, was built with financial assistance from China, yet another Dialogue Partner of ASEAN.

The “Secretariat” is headed by Director-General Roberto Soares, who will be concurrently Ambassador of Timor-Leste to Singapore and Brunei Darussalam.

He said there is no doubt about Timor-Leste’s seriousness to join ASEAN.

Thai Ambassador to Timor-Leste Wiwat Kunthonthien read a congratulatory message from the Director-General of ASEAN-Thailand at the launch ceremony. In the message, the Thai Director-General reiterated Thailand's support for Timor-Leste to join ASEAN, saying that the Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva gave President Ramos-Horta the same assurance when they met on 12 January 2009 in Thailand.

The establishment of Timor-Leste's "Secretariat" underscores the country's seriousness in preparing to join ASEAN, according to the Thai Director-General.

The National Parliament suspended its debate on the national budget to enable the National Parliament President, Cabinet members and Members of Parliament to attend the launch ceremony, which was televised on national TV.

Timor-Leste is developing diplomatic ties with all the 10 ASEAN Member States. The country has opened its embassies in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Bangkok. Timor-Leste's Embassy in Bangkok will handle ties with Cambodia and Laos, while Timor-Leste's Embassy in Kuala Lumpur will handle ties with Myanmar and Viet Nam.