



## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

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### **STATEMENT OF HON. JOÃO CÂNCIO FREITAS, Ph.D MINISTER OF EDUCATION PRESENTED AT 36<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE, PARIS, 25 OCTOBER – 10 NOVEMBER 2011**

Your Excellency Madame President of the General Conference,  
Your Excellency Madame Chairperson of the Executive Board,  
Your Excellency Madame Director General of UNESCO,  
Your Excellencies heads and members of delegations,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Timor-Leste is a young and fledgling nation in terms of institution building and legal frameworks. Next year, we will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of our independence. It is, indeed, a great honour and pleasure for me to be here before such a distinguished assembly and to be able to report that, despite the fact that we are building our country from scratch both in terms of infrastructure and human resources, we have taken all the necessary measures to ensure that Timor-Leste has in place the foundations of a robust and vibrant democracy, good governance and state institutions in which our people have faith. We are keenly aware of the pivotal role that education plays in fuelling and sustaining our development.

We have embraced the Education For All (EFA) objectives and are making progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although our National Education Act was only approved in October 2008, over the past two and half years we have almost completely developed the education regulatory framework and its subsequent implementing laws, restructuring our national education system - starting with the full implementation of universal, compulsory and free education of 9 years of basic education - and developing curriculum contents for all levels of schooling.

We have also approved our Education Strategic Plan for the next five years, within the context of a longer-term 20 year plan, highlighting the Government's commitment to achieving the MDGs and other international obligations that Timor Leste has adhered to. Within the Education Strategic Plan we have established mechanisms for supporting education access and equity for all. The results of the 2010 Census shows that the enrolment rate of children of school age has reached up to 92%. The challenges though are: to increase retention and completion rates, reduce the number of students 'dropping out' of school, as well as developing mechanisms for reducing the disparity in educational opportunities between boys and girls, urban and remote rural areas, and more importantly improving the overall quality of education.

Madame President, ladies and gentlemen.

All our efforts are centred around the objective of developing and improving access and quality education for all in order to provide our people with the

right knowledge, skills and attitudes to be able to fully participate in the national development process and also in the global market.

We are implementing institutional reforms to ensure that our policies are delivered with efficiency and professionalism throughout the entire nation. In order to develop the pool of much needed qualified teachers, we have approved the Teacher-competency framework, and a new Teacher Career Regime providing better incentives and motivation for teachers to perform their tasks ethically and professionally. Nationwide training and retraining programs have been put in place including an accelerated Bachelor Degree program devised specifically for teachers who have not got to that level in order to increase their ability to deliver quality education, as mandated by the law.

As mentioned earlier, new national curriculum contents with the view of promoting and building the knowledge based for improving literacy and numeracy programs for the levels of basic and secondary schooling are currently being implemented. Guided by UNESCO's extensive research over decades on the importance of local languages in education, we are currently developing a national Early Childhood Education and Development policy adopting Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education approach. To ensure social and economic inclusion, we are promoting technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and skills for work as part of lifelong learning, concentrating on secondary and post-secondary training in formal and non-formal settings. In the area of Higher Education, we completed the international external accreditation of our national tertiary institutions and awarded successful ones with operating licences since 2009. There after, annual review are being regularly conducted to ensure the compliance with

international standards. Next year we will commence with Program Accreditation whereby we will be accrediting specific courses being provided by our tertiary institutions, within internationally acceptable framework.

In the informal education area, we have embarked upon an intensive National Literacy Campaign since mid 2007 through the well-known Cuban method “*Sim eu Posso*”, and to date we have freed 60% of the non-literate population as registered in 2007. We are working hard continuing the same path in order for us to declare the whole country completely free from illiteracy before 2015.

In the areas of culture, we are doing our best in terms of preserving our rich cultural heritage and national patrimony. Some foreign researchers have identified 65 sites of ancient rock paintings, some dated back thousand of years, which we would like to protect and preserve not only for the future Timorese generations but as a possible World Heritage site. May I take this opportunity to convey our sincere gratitude to Madame Director General of UNESCO for the support given to the Timor-Leste National Commission for UNESCO, the newest Natcom to get on its feet and to undertake a range of innovative programs to advance nationally UNESCO’s goals and priorities in Education, Science, Culture and Communications. We are conscious of the enormous tasks ahead of us and that we still have a long way to go. We will, therefore, continue to require support from UNESCO in order to achieve our cultural and educational objectives for our people.

Madame President, ladies and gentlemen.

As a young and ‘post conflict’ nation, Timor Leste recognises the importance of education and culture for sustainable developed and for building an economically prosperous future for our people. Education and culture are also at the heart of building a tolerant, just and informed nation - a nation where everyone has the opportunity to be educated and to be part of a wider, culturally-rich community, our world, the global village.

Thank you, *Muito Obrigado*.

João Cândia Freitas, Ph.D

Minister of Education

Timor-Leste