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Distinguished members of the Human Rights Council,

I have the honour of presenting the report on my mission to Timor-Leste, which I undertook in November last year. I wish to extend my gratitude to the Government of Timor-Leste for the support and cooperation provided.

Timor-Leste emerged from a period of conflict and instability just over a decade ago to embark on a process of peace building, state building and development. The country has made significant progress towards the consolidation of peace and security and has experienced rapid economic growth. However, a harsh reality of entrenched poverty and rising inequality hides behind rapid macroeconomic growth indicators. Recent economic growth has not translated into sustained improvements in living conditions or job creation for the majority of the Timorese people.

Poverty remains pervasive and widespread with 41% of the population living on less than one dollar per day. 58% of Timorese children suffers from chronic malnutrition, and unemployment and employment vulnerability is estimated to be as high as 70%.

Timor-Leste has committed to intensify efforts to eradicate poverty and ensure universal access to public services. I commend the Government on its ambitious vision, as articulated in the new Strategic Development Plan, and encourage it to ensure that the realization of human rights of the poorest and most marginalized are at the heart of its efforts.

I take this opportunity to remind Timor-Leste that development must be inclusive, equitable and sustainable. In order to achieve inclusive development, Timor-Leste must ensure that the budget allocations towards essential services are adequate to ensure that even the poorest sectors of society, in particular rural populations, can enjoy their human rights.

I welcome the increase in budget allocation to social services, including health and education adopted after my visit, however, I remain concerned by the fact that the budget allocation to physical infrastructure is disproportionately high, at the expense of resources for desperately-needed health services and quality education provision. Investing in health and education is an investment in the future of Timor-Leste and is critical for sustainable, people-centred development.

Timor-Leste is young both in terms of its nationhood and in the demography of its population: 40% of the population is under 14 years of age and the future of the country will depend on the investment it makes to develop the human capital of its youth. Education is a human right in and of itself but also indispensable for the realization of other human rights, as well as a means to enable people to lift themselves out of poverty.

I commend Timor-Leste for guaranteeing the right of every citizen to education, and ensuring that public primary and secondary education is free and compulsory from grades one to nine. However, the challenges of building a new education system in Timor-Leste are fundamental, as 42% of the population of 15 years and above is unable to read and write in either of the two official languages.

Although Timor-Leste should be proud of its linguistic diversity, this also creates challenges in the education system. Acknowledging the particular challenges that Timor-Leste faces, I call on the Government to confront the challenges of language and education, and to ensure that language is never a barrier to the enjoyment of human rights.

People living in poverty also face other challenges in the realization of their rights, such as in access to justice; access to health services, housing and land; as well as social security and social protection.

With regard to access to justice by people living in poverty, I welcome the recent decree of the Council of Ministers amending the Law on the Juridical Regime Governing the Private Legal Profession and Lawyers Training, which extends the transitional regime for lawyers to continue practicing until 31 December 2015. I also note the ongoing work of the Government on the legal framework for legal aid. I emphasise that the Government should ensure broad availability of legal aid, in particular to vulnerable groups, and that there should be ongoing consultation with a broad range of stakeholders in finalising the legal framework. In my report I have also explored other recommendations to improve access to justice for children and the youth.

Timor-Leste has made notable progress in increasing access to and improving the quality of basic health care services, the success of which is evidenced by dramatically improved health indicators. Timor-Leste has achieved Millennium Development Goal 4, to reduce the under-5 mortality rate by two thirds. At the same time, Timor-Leste continues to

experience one of the highest rates of chronic child under-nutrition in the world and malnutrition among women is also a serious concern, nonetheless, I acknowledge the Government's efforts in implementing a nutrition campaign.

Despite the Government's efforts, many barriers remain, including physical distance, conditions of the facilities or quality of service, that prevent people from accessing health care. Particularly concerning is access to maternal health care, generally insufficient in the whole country, but considerably worse outside Dili. This engenders the high incidence of maternal mortality, which is unacceptable and preventable. I call on the Government to increase expenditure and adopt policies that strengthen health systems, giving priority to maternal health.

Another important issue of concern for people living in poverty is their access to housing, and access to land. More than ten years after the extensive destruction and violence in 1999, adequate housing remains out of reach for many Timorese: 58% of communities live in poor housing conditions and the majority of them with no access to clean water and sanitation. During my mission I witnessed the conditions in which people who have suffered forced eviction are living. Development cannot be an excuse to displace and destroy the homes of people living in poverty, who are entitled to protection against forced evictions and arbitrary interference in their home and privacy.

I commend Timor-Leste for its efforts in expanding and implementing social protection programmes. From a human rights perspective, universal social protection schemes are the best way for States to ensure that there is no discrimination in the selection of beneficiaries. However, if universal coverage is not possible, social protection should prioritize reaching the poorest among the poor before moving to progressively wider coverage.

In the report, I also call for increased efforts towards a more inclusive decision-making process, highlighting the current concentration of decision-making powers in Dili. Development should be a 'bottom up' process in which the population can meaningfully and effectively participate in the establishment of national priorities.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to congratulate Timor-Leste on its advances so far and I call on the Government to redouble its efforts to reduce poverty, achieve inclusive

economic growth and development, and build sustainable industries and a strong economy that will benefit the poorest and the most vulnerable in Timorese society. I have the impression that progress is being made in realizing the rights of those living in poverty in Timor-Leste, yet more can and must be done. Given that much has been achieved already, I believe all of these changes are feasible.

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