



WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

H.E. Milena Pires

Representative of Timor-Leste AICHR

**At the 4TH ASEAN CONSULTATION ON THE HUMAN RIGHT TO
DEVELOPMENT TO ENHANCE AND STRENGTHEN THE ASEAN
COMMUNITY AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION**

20 August 2026

H.E. Excellency Bendito dos Santos Freitas, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Excellency Milena Rangel, Deputy Minister for ASEAN Affairs

Excellency Bolivar Bao, Alternate Representative of the Philippines to AICHR, representing the AICHR Chair

Excellency Edmund Bon Tai Soon, Representative of Malaysia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights,

Excellencies, Representatives, and Alternates of ASEAN Member States to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights,

Ms. Leanne Smith, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Human Rights Commission,

Ms. Olufunmilayo Abosede Balogun-Alexander, United Nations Resident Coordinator for Timor-Leste,

Distinguished experts, participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Dadeer manek ba ita hotu.

It is with great honour, pleasure, and a deep sense of pride that I welcome all of you to Dili, Timor-Leste, for the 4th ASEAN Consultation on the Human Right to Development to Enhance and Strengthen the ASEAN Community and Its Implementation.

At the outset, allow me to express our deepest appreciation to all those who have contributed to making this Consultation possible.

First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge the Government of Timor-Leste for its strong commitment and support in hosting this important regional Consultation.

I also wish to express our sincere gratitude to our colleagues from AICHR Malaysia for their commitment, close cooperation and valuable assistance in making it possible for this Consultation to be held here in Dili.



I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to my fellow AICHR Representatives from all ASEAN Member States for their collective support and for their agreement to utilise the ASEAN AICHR Fund for this important Consultation.

Finally, I wish to extend our sincere gratitude to the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for their generous financial support, technical assistance and continued partnership in making this Consultation possible.

To all our partners and colleagues, please accept our heartfelt appreciation. Your contributions have been instrumental in bringing this important regional Consultation to Dili and in strengthening Timor-Leste's meaningful participation in the ASEAN human rights architecture.

We are particularly honoured to co-convene this consultation at an important moment for ASEAN and for the global human rights community: 40 years since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, and following ASEAN Leaders' adoption, in October 2025, of the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting the Right to Development and the Right to Peace Towards Realising Inclusive and Sustainable Development.

These milestones remind us that development is not simply about economic growth, infrastructure or rising national income. Development is about people. It is about whether every person, woman and man, every girl and boy, young people and older person, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, LGBTI persons, migrant workers and every community, especially rural and remote communities, have the opportunity to participate in, contribute to and benefit from development, and whether, that development, enables the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This understanding is deeply consistent with ASEAN's vision of a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN Community. It also reflects the commitment expressed in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, and the ambition of ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future to build a resilient, inclusive, sustainable and people-centred ASEAN Community.

For Timor-Leste, this is a particularly meaningful conversation. As a young nation that emerged from conflict and built its institutions through democratic processes and international cooperation, we have learned that peace, human rights and development are inseparable. Sustainable development requires peace; peace requires inclusion, dignity and opportunity; and human rights provide the foundation upon which both can be sustained.

Our own perspective on the right to development therefore also places people at the centre. And youth must be at the heart of this vision. In Timor-Leste 65% of our population is under 30, making our young people not simply beneficiaries of development, but one of our greatest assets and partners in building the future.

As ASEAN becomes increasingly interconnected, we must ensure that young people have the education, skills, decent work, digital opportunities and meaningful participation they need to shape development – not only for themselves, but for a peaceful, inclusive and sustainable ASEAN community we seek to build.

We see development as a comprehensive process that should reduce inequalities, expand opportunities and ensure access to education, healthcare, social protection, food security, climate-resilient infrastructure and inclusive governance.

For countries facing structural vulnerabilities, including least developed countries and small island developing States, genuine international cooperation, access to finance, technology, capacity-building and fair economic opportunities are essential.

This perspective also reinforces an important principle for our discussion today: international solidarity is not charity; it is a shared responsibility. ASEAN's strength lies precisely in our ability to work together, learn from one another and ensure that no Member State, community or person is left behind.

The 4th Consultation gives us an opportunity to move from principle to implementation. The adoption of the



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ASEAN Declaration on the Right to Development and the Right to Peace is an important achievement. Our task now is to consider how its commitments can be translated into practical policies, institutions and partnerships across the three ASEAN Community pillars—the Political-Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural Communities.

I hope our discussions will therefore be practical and forward-looking: identifying good practices; examining challenges and opportunities; strengthening cooperation among AICHR, ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, Member States and stakeholders; and considering how human rights can be mainstreamed across development policies.

Our discussions on peace and security, business and human rights, climate change and environmental rights, migration, gender equality and the situation of vulnerable and marginalised groups are especially important. These issues demonstrate why the right to development cannot be addressed through a single sector or institution. It requires a whole-of-ASEAN and whole-of-society approach, with meaningful participation from the people who are most affected by development decisions.

As we mark the 40th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, we should also look forward. The question before us is not only what the right to development means, but how we can make it real in the lives of our people.

Let us use this consultation to strengthen an ASEAN approach that is people-centred, rights-based, inclusive, sustainable, peaceful and resilient—an approach in which development is measured not only by what our economies produce, but by the dignity, opportunities and well-being that development creates for our people.

Timor-Leste is honoured to contribute to this important ASEAN conversation and to learn from the experiences of our fellow Member States and partners. We look forward to working closely with AICHR Malaysia and all participants towards meaningful outcomes and sustained follow-up to the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting the Right to Development and the Right to Peace.

I warmly welcome you all, once again to Timor-Leste and wish us a productive, candid and forward-looking consultation.

Muito obrigada. Thank you.