

"Towards Peace and Democracy in Burma"

European Parliament, 05th October 2010

Speech Maria da Graça Carvalho

His Excellency, President Ramos-Horta

President Daul

Ambassadors

Members of the European Parliament

Distinguished Guest

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a co-organiser of the present event and co-president of the Economic Development, Finance and Trade Committee of the ACP-UE Joint Parliamentary Assembly in the European Parliament, it is with great pleasure that I welcome President Ramos-Horta here today.

President Ramos-Horta will be speaking about Burma and about peace and democracy in the country in particular. As you certainly know, Burma, as a military dictatorship has chronic problems with human rights abuses. These include:

- child abuse
- violation of the rights of minorities
- forced labour
- a degree of alleged corruption involving a number of multinationals
- according to human rights groups, the government still holds 2,200 political prisoners
- not allowing sufficient aid to enter the region affected by the Cyclone Nargis where more than 3 million were homeless and around 150,000 are thought to have died
- members of religious orders in Burma including an estimated 400 000 Buddhist monks, are explicitly banned from voting

and a range of other problems too numerous to mention here.

President Ramos-Horta's visit today is particularly timely in view of the elections due for the 7th of November. As you will know, these elections do not meet the minimum standards of a democracy:

- San Suu Kyi is still under house arrest and will remain so until after the elections. She has been detained for 14 of the past 20 years
- Individuals with foreign spouses cannot stand for elections

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- 25% of seats in the lower chamber are reserved for the military

and so on and so forth.

Under these conditions, the National League for Democracy, - the clear victor of the last elections -, has decided not to take part in the forthcoming elections.

San Suu Kyi's personnel courage, bravery and persistency provide inspiration to the world. She has dedicated her life to the fight for freedom and democracy. We call on the Burmese government for the immediate release of San Suu Kyi and all the other political prisoners. They should be able to reunite with their families and attain - together with the Burmese people - their dream of a free, democratic and prosperous Burma.

Mr Tomás Quintana, the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Burma, released a highly critical report earlier this year. Subsequently, the United Nations has called for the creation of a UN-led commission to investigate alleged war crimes in Burma.

This inquiry has been backed by the US, Australia and a number of European countries such as the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. However, any attempt to bring this enquiry to a conclusion in the Security Council is likely to be opposed by China and perhaps by Russia. **The stance of the EU, however, remains a little unclear and hopefully this conference will contribute to strengthening EU resolve in the matter. We urge the EU to make Burma one of its top priorities.**

In May, the European Parliament approved a resolution that called for a whole series of reforms including, notably,

- the release of all political prisoners,
- the establishment of a genuine dialogue with all parties and ethnic groups
- and the use of the considerable leverage possessed by China, India and Russia to encourage structural reform in Burma.

President Ramos-Horta has a high profile in so far as human rights issues are concerned. Indeed, he has also been involved in a whole range of noteworthy causes. In recent speeches, including in a

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recent speech to the UN, he has spoken eloquently about such matters as the Iranian problem, the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the West Sahara to name only these.

President Ramos-Horta is equally concerned with the fight against climate change, the recognition of human rights, the status of women in different societies and cultures across the world and the list goes on. He has proven himself to be a very good friend of Europe and it would *not* be an understatement to say he is nothing short of a national hero in Portugal today.

At present, Mr. Ramos-Horta is the President of East Timor. The country did not achieve independence until 2002, becoming one of the most recent additions to the UN list of recognised countries. President Ramos-Horta served as the exiled spokesman for the East Timorese resistance during the years of the Indonesian occupation. After East Timor achieved independence, Ramos-Horta was appointed as the country's first Minister of State and Foreign Minister. In 2006, he was appointed as Prime Minister and then President of East Timor from May 2007.

President Ramos-Horta has several academic degrees in International Law and Foreign Policy from the Hague, from Strasbourg and Columbia University. He is a Senior Associate Member of St Antony's College at the University of Oxford.

He has received many international prizes and in 1996 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

I visited President Ramos Horta this summer in East Timor as part of the preparation for this event. I was able to see the enormous progress that the country had made since independence in terms of macro-economic conditions and good governance. East Timor has been awarded the top place in Asia and the third place in the world in terms of transparency and the effective management of oil and gas revenues. The country has also introduced a number of welcome social reforms with regard to such things as care for the elderly, widows and the disabled. The country has also given top priority to education and health policies.

East Timor, as a small country situated in Asia- but with strong and friendly ties with Europe- is very well placed to act as a bridge between the ACP, the CPLP (the Community of Portuguese language countries), the ASEAN countries and Europe.

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During my visit, we had a very fruitful exchange, principally concerning climate change, it must be said. I was enormously gratified to learn that he was willing to address the European Parliament, something that has led directly to President Ramos-Horta's presence here today.

President Ramos-Horta is particularly well positioned to play a prominent role in the Burma process that we all hope will lead to peace, stability and democracy. To quote President Ramos Horta "the rich historical and cultural identity of East Timor constitutes a unique asset in building bridges of dialogue and co-operation between peoples of the region. Furthermore, small countries can succeed in mediating conflicts when mighty powers have failed"

It only remains for me to thank President Ramos-Horta again and to hand you over to President Ramos-Horta himself.