



FRENTE REVOLUCIONÁRIA DO TIMOR-LESTE INDEPENDENTE FRETILIN

Media getting it wrong about the relationship between the President and the Prime Minister of Timor Leste

FRETILIN's Sydney spokesperson, Mr Sahe da Silva, today expressed disappointment with claims from sections of the media that there is a political power struggle between the Prime Minister of East Timor, Mari Alkatiri, and the President of the Republic, Xanana Gusmao. The initial reports suggesting that the President would dismiss the elected government, and more recently accusations suggesting that the President was the figure behind the recent attempted coup d'état, are far from the truth.

There is no power struggle between the Prime Minister and the President. The President, as the Head of State and leader of the independence struggle, has the political and moral authority to deal with the various political groups within the country, particularly during a crisis such as now being experienced in Timor Leste. The Prime Minister, as the Head of Government, based on a 57% majority in the 2001 election, has the legal authority and the political mandate to manage the country. Especially since the violent incident of December 4, 2002, and now during the current crisis, these two leaders have worked in close collaboration to find an effective and lasting resolution. Both understand and have stated that any action taken to resolve the crisis must be within the boundaries of the Constitution and must uphold the rule of law.

During recent weeks, the President, despite intense speculation to the contrary, never requested the dismissal of the government or the removal of the Prime Minister. It was simply never discussed or on the table as a possible solution. There is no doubt that the President and the Prime Minister have different points of view on various issues and that these views are often expressed at their weekly meetings. However, these differences are not evidence of political rivalry, but just a difference of opinion about how the country's affairs should be managed. This is no different to other democracies where disagreements between key political figures are commonplace and where there exists a certain degree of tension between the various arms of government.

The President's statement to the Parliament last Wednesday that he would always uphold the Constitution and respect for the rule of law was welcomed by the East Timorese MPs and people. This has effectively signalled, for now, the end of the push by certain local political players to have the Prime Minister undemocratically removed and for a new Government that supports their interests to be installed. It dispels any notion that the

President requested the resignation of the Prime Minister, and certainly quashes any speculation that he is behind any attempt to overthrow the Government.

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FRETILIN, the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor, was formed on May 20, 1974, to campaign for an independent East Timor, following the April 25 1974 Revolution in Portugal. FRETILIN was a key component in the National Council of Timorese Resistance, created in 1998 to unite all Timorese political parties. CNRT led the campaign for the independence vote conducted by the UN on August 30, 1999. In the Constituent Assembly election of August 30, 2001, FRETILIN won 57% of the votes and 55 out of 88 seats.