

*Speech by Gwi-Yeop Son  
At the  
Launch of the Human Development Report  
On  
Thursday July 12, 2001*

Good morning Cabinet Member and Head of Social Affairs, Fr. Filomeno Jacob, Rector of the National University of East Timor, Mr. Armindo Maia, distinguished guests, students, members of the media, friends and colleagues.

Every year since 1990, The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has commissioned the ***Human Development Report***. The Report is produced by an independent team of experts, who explore major issues of global concern. It looks beyond per capita income and also measures human progress against such factors as, average life expectancy, literacy and overall well-being.

As in previous years, the Report ranks 162 countries according to the level of Human Development achieved. You will notice that East Timor is not ranked. As of yet, an index for East Timor has not been developed, but, I have good news. Yesterday the Transitional Cabinet gave UNDP the go ahead to coordinate the production of East Timor's first ***National Human Development Report***. We hope that during this process an index for East Timor will be developed. The index can then be included in the global report. So, in future, decision makers will have a reference point as to how East Timor is developing in relation to other nations. We also hope the National Report will provide a springboard for the future government and development partners to formulate national plans and policies for sustainable development.

In previous years the Global Human Development Report has covered issues including: human rights, globalization, gender, and human security. This year, it is about how people can create and use technology to improve their lives.

Some of you may be thinking, why is it important to link technology with development when, for example, a basic technology, such as electricity, is still not accessible for some two billion people around the world? Are there not a myriad of more pressing issues, such as creating jobs, providing health services and basic education, which need to be tackled before we zoom off into the world of information technology?

World-wide, there are still 1.2 billion people who live on less than \$1 a day. Eleven million children below the age of five die every year from preventable causes. Nearly one billion people are still without access to safe drinking water. There is no doubt that many countries, including East Timor -- where the average annual income of US\$304 is comparable to some of the world's poorest nations -- have major obstacles to overcome on the road to development. However, that road is fast becoming a highway and countries that are failing to keep pace are being left behind. The Human Development Report this year concludes that even the world's poorest nations need to implement policies that encourage innovation, advanced skills and access to new technologies. Otherwise they risk falling behind in human development and being marginalized in the global economy.

In this regard, East Timor is in a very fortunate situation. The Report includes a ranking indicating the world's leading hubs of technological

innovation and achievement. Of Course many of these hubs are in Europe, Japan and the US. But, they also exist right on your doorstep. Asian neighbors such as Malaysia were ranked as emerging leaders, and my own country Korea, was ranked in the top five of current leaders -- ahead of the United Kingdom, Germany and many other industrialized nations. By taking advantage of technical cooperation among developing countries, East Timor could benefit greatly from the skills and knowledge already developed by countries in similar development situations.

Already, many of the most important technology opportunities for poor people have been missed. Governments in both developed and developing countries have failed to provide the support needed to carry out research into vaccines for illness such as HIV/AIDS, which has the potential to reduce the future GDP of Africa by a third over the next 20 years. For instance in 1998 global spending on health research was around US\$70 billion, but just \$300 million was dedicated to vaccines for HIV/AIDS. Likewise, the development of low-cost computers and energy systems, which could provide untold opportunities for people in developing countries, has been given low priority.

Investment in technology, like investment in education, can equip people with better tools and make them more productive and prosperous. Technology is a tool, not just a reward, for growth and development.

UNDP is committed to supporting the Transitional Administration and the future government of East Timor in meeting these challenges, because we believe that technology is an indispensable tool for overcoming poverty.

The IT training center, which we are officially opening today, is part of a larger initiative that UNDP is implementing to ensure that, from the outset, the world's newest nation does not find itself in the slow lane on the development highway.

East Timor will rely on the students who graduate from this center to make technology work for national development. The graduates will be able to introduce new technologies and ideas into the workplace. They will be equipped to access information from around the world in numerous fields via the internet. And, I hope, they will become the innovators who will use technology as a tool for the development of East Timor.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the National University of East Timor, especially Armindo Maia, and Paul Selvaraj, the Executive director of the Malaysian NGO, Yayasan Salam Malaysia, for their dedication and support in getting the IT center up and running. I would also like to thank the Asian Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP) and CISCO enterprises for their continued support of UNDP's information technology work in East Timor.

Thank you all for joining us today and I hope you find the Human Development Report 2001 a useful resource.

Thank you.