

*World Environment Day and launch of Environment issues and priorities report*

*Date: Friday June 8*

*Time: 7.30am – 8.30am*

*Place: Turismo Hotel*

5 Minutes

### **Speaking Points**

Good Morning Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Head of the National Planning and Development Agency, Ms. Emilia Pires, Head of the Environmental Protection unit, Mr. George Bouma, media representatives, friends and colleagues.

I am glad you all made the effort to get up a little earlier this morning to join us for this dual celebration. Today we are celebrating World Environment Day, as well as the launch of the first report ever to outline the most important environmental concerns in East Timor.

Incredible challenges lie ahead for East Timor, particularly in the immediate future. Discussions about the environment are sometimes lost as countless other issues demand our attention. However, the protection of the environment is central to the success of development. Let me give you an example, agriculture, forestry and fishing, are responsible for more than one half of all employment worldwide, but the capacity of ecosystems to continue to produce many of the goods and services we all depend on is declining. Over the past 50 years, two-thirds of the world's agricultural lands have been degraded, 75 percent of the major marine fish stocks are either depleted or being fished at their biological limit and much of the world faces water shortages resulting from overexertion and pollution.

In East Timor more than 75 percent of people live in rural areas and rely on agriculture to earn a living. These are the people whose livelihoods will be adversely affected if East Timor's decision makers fail to put the brakes on environmental degradation.

This is why, when the Transitional Administration came to us with a request to support the first assessment of the issues and concerns in East Timor, we immediately developed a project and sought funding. The Norwegian Government stepped forward, and I would like to thank them for this.

At the outset of this project our aims were to:

- Have a realistic assessment that decision makers and other stakeholders could use as a baseline for developing policy and projects that would address environmental concerns.
- We also wanted to increase awareness about the key issues that came out of the assessment. These issues were defined following hundreds of consultations at all levels of East Timorese society.
- And, finally, we aimed to develop priority project proposals that could resolve immediate environmental concerns.

Today the assessment is finalized, and the funding proposals are being further discussed within the Administration prior to submission to

Cabinet. It is now time to raise awareness about the eight priorities revealed through the assessment.

I know a number of journalists here today have written extensively about environmental issues in East Timor. There are publications in circulation, such as “Verde”, that are dedicated to putting environment on the public agenda. NGOs, such as “Haburas” are working with communities to spread the word and strengthen traditional laws that govern the use of natural resources. And, I believe, they would all agree with me when I call all of you to become partners with us to campaign for environmental protection to become a standard consideration during the planning and implementation of any initiative or policy. I ask this for a very simple reason. The majority of East Timorese depend on the environment to live, and without a living environment, poverty will thrive.

Thank you.