



PRESS RELEASE

INMATES SHOWCASE THEIR NEW SKILLS

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Inmates from Becora Prison in Dili will present a range of products on Tuesday 23 November in an exhibition showcasing their work. The guests at the exhibition will include the President, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao; Prime Minister, Dr. Mari Alkatiri; Minister of Justice, Mr Domingos Sarmiento; and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNDP Resident Representative, Dr. Sukehiro Hasegawa.

The exhibition is being held with support from a pilot initiative called *Vocational Training and Educational Opportunities for Prisoners*, being implemented with the Ministry of Justice, under the US\$3.12m 'Strengthening the Justice System in Timor-Leste' Project. With technical support from UNDP, the pilot aims to strengthen the capacity of the Prisons Service to facilitate the successful reintegration of ex-prisoners into society, while also providing inmates with meaningful vocational and educational activities. These include training in basic literacy, Portuguese language classes, carpentry, construction, traditional 'tais' weaving, rattan furniture production, sewing and anger management.

The Ministry of Justice approved the pilot in March 2004, and rehabilitation of the prison facilities began immediately. Training has been introduced gradually since April. There are now 42 inmates taking part in vocational training and 105 inmates are undertaking basic literacy and Portuguese classes through the educational opportunities being provided. With the newly acquired skills from the sewing course, inmates are already producing uniforms for themselves and for prison guards.

The exhibition will showcase the products produced by the inmates through the course of their training, and includes, rattan furniture, tais and tais products, such as, wallets, backpacks, and mobile covers and much more.

The Directorate of Prison Services is responsible for the coordination and promotion of economic activities in prisons and for providing educational and professional training for inmates, as a means of giving them tools to become useful members of society upon their release. Accordingly, UNDP is working closely with the Prison Services to achieve these objectives.

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Timor-Leste

The project works in synergy with other related initiatives through strategic partnerships. The Non-formal Education Department of the Ministry of Education Youth, Culture and Sports, the Instituto Camoes and the Portuguese Embassy have supported the literacy and Portuguese language courses. UNICEF has been involved in working with juvenile delinquents, UNFPA has been supporting anger management training, and the Centro Nacional de Emprego e Formacao Profissional under the Secretariat of State for Labor and Solidarity, has provided trainers, advice and equipment.

The Ministry of Justice is hailing the pilot as a success and hopes to replicate it in other prisons.

“Work, both physical and mental, can be instrumental in keeping inmates alert and active, giving them skills that prevent recidivism once they return to their communities. Providing useful educational and vocational training is a way of creating future work opportunities, self employment and also assist in a smoother reintegration into society upon their release” , said the Minister of Justice, Mr Domingos Sarmiento.

This Pilot is being supported through a generous contribution from Denmark.

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