STATEMENT BY

H.E. MRS. MARIA HELENA PIRES
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

Intervention at the UNICEF Executive Board Meeting during the Second regular session 2020 on the Consideration of the Country Programme Document for Timor-Leste

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* Check against delivery
Thank you, Madam President for giving me the floor. It is my privilege to address the Board on the discussion of Timor-Leste's Country Program Document.

Timor-Leste welcomes and commends UNICEF for the CPD for the period 2021-2025. The CPD is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the 2030 agenda, and Timor-Leste's National Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030 which places human capital development as our national priority. Since the completion of the CPD in May, there have been positive political developments which we hope can be adjusted in subsequent documents.

With your permission Madam President, it is my honor to read part of a message from Timor-Leste's Minister of Education, H.E Armindo Maia. We have provided the Secretariat with the full copy of the text."
Speech to UNICEF Executive Board Meeting

Your Excellency, President of the Board, Distinguished members of the board,

May I extend warm greetings from Timor-Leste to the distinguished president and to all members of the board.

It is a great honor, to address this distinguished board in my capacity as the new Minister of Education, Youth and Sport of the Government of Timor-Leste.

As a young nation, Timor-Leste is proud to be associated with UNICEF. UNICEF has provided outstanding support to Timor-Leste in the development of its education system, right from the early stages of our independence, when we had to build everything from scratch. Indeed, as the first Minister of Education after we restored our independence in May 2002, I have witnessed the tremendous support UNICEF has been providing to advance quality education for all children in our nation.

Through the years, with the support of UNICEF and other partners in the international community, we were able to rebuild our schools, train our teachers, install water systems and develop our school curriculum. We have clearly made great strides: our primary school enrollment rate has risen from 46% in 1999 to close to 100% today.

However, as in many other fragile countries around the world in post-conflict situation, Timor-Leste still faces multiple challenges in education. Although our Basic Law of Education mandates equal opportunity for all children, we are still far from achieving this.

When COVID-19 hit our tiny country in March, a State of Emergency was declared, and the Ministry of Education ordered schools to be closed. In large part due to UNICEF support, we were quickly able to organize activities to ensure learning could continue. Within one week, we had television and radio programs on the air to provide distance learning for students. We launched the Learning Passport Platform, which now hosts all textbooks and teaching and learning materials developed by the Ministry. These efforts were supplemented with the printing and distribution of books to rural areas where there is no television or internet access. We even did our first-ever online teacher training; some 17,000 teachers were trained online on COVID-19 prevention – this would have taken months to accomplish if it was done any other way.
As Timor-Leste successfully defended itself against COVID-19, the Ministry began to devise plans to re-open schools, safely, and with an emphasis on learning. The closure of schools due to COVID-19 has exacerbated all our previous challenges – lack of water, insufficient school infrastructure, poor teacher discipline and weak school management and most of all, less than satisfactory learning achievement. However, with UNICEF and other partners’ support, we were able to provide our schools with water and other necessities to ensure they could re-open safely. As a result of all these measures and thanks to the lack of local transmission of COVID-19 across the country, we successfully reopened our schools by almost 99% by the end of August 2020.

COVID-19 has also forced us to rethink and reimagine our strategies to accelerate progress in education. We look at this as an opportunity to propel our education system towards excellence and equity. In order to realize these dreams, we are confident that UNICEF will continue to provide key support in areas such as curriculum reform, teacher training, online learning opportunities for teachers and students and WASH in schools along with strengthening evidence generation to inform education planning and management. Together with UNICEF, we look forward to providing a bright future for all children in Timor-Leste.

Thank you!

Obrigado Barak!

[Signature]

Dr. ARMINDO MAIA
Minister of Education, Youth and Sports