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A Word or Two from Father Guilhermino da Silva

"Here in Timor-Leste, the Government has decided to extend another one month of state of emergency. Yet people are allowed to do the activities in a normal way by strictly observing the measurements from the health institution. The church is again open to the public but limited only to Eucharistic Celebration. The school is still undecided to open because the Minister of Education is still waiting the protocol from the Minister of Health. But I am quite sure that in the near future the schools are back to normal.

In Timor-Leste the Minister of Health with the support of WHO have declared Covid 19 free. Which is quite relief for Timor-Leste after two months living under uncertainty and fear. Thanks be to God that He still protects us in His loving care.

Our parish has successfully distributed food parcels to about 500 needy families, and will continue to assist those who come to ask for the support. Once again thank you very much for your generosity."

Coronavirus in Timor

Taken from article by Fidelis Magalhães May 04, 2020 in The Diplomat

The Timorese people and their government have engaged successfully so far with the COVID-19 crisis, despite a struggling health care system and emerging economy. The first case of COVID-19 was detected on March 21 and a week later a state of emergency was declared. Schools were closed and large gatherings and public transport were stopped. Though many businesses remained open, most citizens chose to reduce their economic activity or left for rural areas. As of May 1, 2020, there were 24 known COVID-19 cases and 16 of those patients recovered. All cases so far were imported and almost all entered through the Indonesian land border, which has since been closed. No deaths or serious hospitalisations have yet been recorded.

The government decided to take timely and decisive action at the earliest possible stage to both contain the spread of the virus and to support the nation.

There were two main health goals. First, to tackle and suppress the invisible killer by deploying health measures to isolate and care for patients while increasing tracing and testing. Second, to follow the science and gradually lift containment measures only when six certain health conditions are met, following the guidance of the World Health Organisation. *(Continued over page...)*

Despite Timor-Leste having been spared the ravages of the Coronavirus so far, it must be remembered that every day, every week, every year is a challenge regarding Timorese people's health and basic nutrition.

Persistent food insecurity and hunger in Timor-Leste have been the case for decades, and have resulted in high rates of malnutrition among Timorese youth and adults across the generations. Over half of the population suffers from moderate and severe stunting, a direct result of insufficient food.

Coronavirus in Timor cont.

The management of the crisis is not a simple choice between saving the economy and protecting people's health. The emergency is complex and requires striking a precarious balance in sectors that directly affect citizens' lives and livelihoods.

Safety net

On the economic side, the government has designed several measures to reduce financial insecurity and to address the threat of widening inequality, poverty, and hunger that many Timorese families could experience during the emergency. The centrepiece of this response was a decision to strengthen and expand the social safety net. By implementing a cash transfer of \$100 to households with monthly income of \$500 and below, the government tried to address the people's most pressing needs and make health measures more effective and tolerable.

Food and microfinance initiatives

Other plans included the government's support of family expenses by purchasing sufficient staple foods to avert food insecurity and hunger. The government is funding the revival of agricultural production with considerable subsidies of approximately \$5 million to keep the food supply moving in the country. Banks and microfinance institutions are encouraged to lend to enterprises even when their cash-flow is under pressure. The

government aims to stabilise employment and avoid firm closures by creating a wage subsidy of 60 percent. Opportunities have been made available for microfinance enterprises to take part in support schemes previously open only to banks. This is of great significance as most farmers are self-subsistent and rely on a variety of small business supports to survive.

Subsistence farming

According to the 2015 census, 95 percent of the informal sector are subsistence farmers. Many farmers grow their own food and will be somewhat shielded from the economic consequences of the crisis. The government is also extending coverage like unemployment insurance, subsidising wages, together with measures to generate income security through targeted cash transfers and other social assistance programs, as well as focusing on generating employment during the health emergency to cushion the economic blow and support the recovery.

Role of the Petroleum Fund

Both the health and economic measures rely on a Petroleum Fund that enjoys a strong fiscal position, valued in March 2020 at \$17 billion. The Fund is meant to act as a buffer when the nation faces grave fluctuations and it is precisely during health and economic crises like those brought by COVID-19 that the Fund can help the Timorese people to avoid this current negative shock.

People's lives come first. The Fund can support health measures and cushion against the looming economic downturn. Its value can be maintained through fiscally prudent withdrawals. Its assets, even after subsidising health initiatives and an economic stimulus package, will remain roughly 10 times annual GDP.

Timor compared to neighbours

This economic response measures are similar in relative size to those in more advanced ASEAN neighbours like Singapore and Malaysia, whose stimulus packages are roughly 10 percent of their GDPs.

The measures announced so far describe the Timor-Leste government's short-term, emergency economic response to the COVID-19 shock. Many more measures will be required in a recovery and stabilisation phase, which is expected to last several months after the coronavirus crisis.

Fidelis Magalhães is Timor-Leste's Minister of Legislative Reforms and Parliamentary Affairs, and acting Minister Coordinator of Economic Affairs.

Australia invaded Portuguese East Timor on 17 December 1941. The invasion was not to protect Timor, but Australia. The Japanese matched the Australian breach of neutrality and invaded on 19th February, 1942.

Life expectancy for the Timorese population is increasing and is now about 69 years. This increase has happened since independence because of reductions in poverty through an increase in the availability of food. Foreign aid, such as that supplied by groups like ATLAS, is a strong component of this advance.

ATLAS would like to thank all our generous donors for their assistance. Those in Timor who benefit from ATLAS' efforts do appreciate their friends in Australia. They do not forget us, and we will not forget them.

Virtual Timor Time

Who would have thought it?

2020 has certainly seen many changes to our way of life right across the world with the COVID 19 pandemic.

For us at ATLAS life has gone on in a quite different way. As with so many other groups, we are all still working hard as volunteers to ensure that our friends in Timor are not forgotten during this crisis.

Technology has helped our committee to come together once a month to keep remembering the debt of honour and the promise made by our Australian government: "Your friends will not forget you".

Our friends in Timor have certainly been on the front foot with COVID, with very few cases.

However, the lockdown lifts soon and there may be work for supporters of Timor-Leste.

Our volunteers at ATLAS have been in contact with the Sisters at Fatuhada, Maubara and Hera to see how they are all coping. In true Timorese style they have been concerned for all of us here in Australia.

Our annual Timor Time luncheon will be different this year. ATLAS will be hosting an online Timor Time with some special guests to share their Timorese experience. Our theme is Timor Time 2020, as last year marked 20 years of Independence.



Chair of ATLAS Gerald Kenneally, with Sister Inacia discussing ATLAS projects (a little while ago...)

We'll look at the past and the present, and imagine what lies ahead in this special online "Timor Time" towards the end of August or early September.

To all our donors: I thank you for your continued support of ATLAS, especially during these current times. I write on behalf of all of our committed volunteers as we all come together in many and different ways to help each other to remember our friends just across the Timor Sea.

Take care,

Gerald Kenneally

Chairman, Australia Timor-Leste Advancement Society

Around 60,000 Timorese civilians died in WWII because they sided with the Australians. Timor's losses were 20 times greater than Australia's – and they were all civilians. *Paddy Kenneally and Rufino Alves Correia - pictured here representing an indestructible national bond.* Photo: Jon



Fard's Gift

ATLAS received this wonderful account of Patrick Knight and his family who have generously supported St Therese's Orphanage at Maubara for many years. ATLAS and the Maubara Orphanage thank the Knight Family sincerely for their wonderful support.

"In 2008 at the age of 76 our beloved father Patrick Knight nicknamed Fard by his loving 18 grandchildren, 27 great grandchildren and a great-great grandchild, was moved by the story of a young woman who spoke at his local church—St Mary's, Orange, NSW. The young woman told the congregation of the opportunities she was given with the support of her benefactor and how that act of charity had given her a life and a future.

Now our Dad was a man of few words, but a deep thinker and while working in his much-loved veggie garden one morning decided that he could help. He had a large family 8 children and all those grandkids!

When gathered together to celebrate Christmas he spoke to each working adult, starting with his children and explained his idea and how as a family we could all help. Dad knew that by starting with a small contribution everyone had an opportunity to be involved. As Dad and Mum have always known through experiences in life, every little bit helps and with the love and support of their family they knew they could make a difference one small act of

"Fard's family"



kindness at a time. With his little family stash and the help of his Parish, Dad and Mum were introduced to Sr Josephine Mitchell and the story of St Therese's Orphanage Maubara, East Timor.

Dad would spend time every year with his family sharing information and pictures on how the family contribution was being put to good use and the positive impact on the East Timorese children and their careers. It was important to him that we understood the difference we could make together. Equally as wonderful was the positive impact that the act of giving and appreciation of others had on his own family, especially all his grandchildren and great grandchildren and their understanding of kindness in action.

Every Christmas since, the collection has continued to grow. Sadly, we no longer have this beautiful humble man in body but his legacy continues through his family and is fondly known as **FARD'S GIFT.**"



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