

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMAO

Xanana Gusmão was the first democratically elected Head of State of the newly established nation of Timor-Leste / East Timor.

His election marked the culmination of an extraordinary personal journey which began in the 70s, when the Timorese young society discussed issues about the Liberation Movements in Africa against the Portuguese colonial rule and, after the Carnation Revolution in April 1974, in Lisbon. Xanana Gusmão joined the pro-independence Movement FRETILIN.

After the fall of then Leader of the Resistance, Nicolau Lobato, on the 31st of December 1979, he became the Commander-in-Chief of the guerrilla army, until his capture on the 20th of November 1992. He then spent 7 years in an Indonesian jail before being released in September 1999, after a United Nations-supervised referendum, in which the people of Timor-Leste voted for independence. In 2002, he was elected as President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

These accomplishments alone would be significant enough to merit his recognition by the University, but his subsequent achievements have been equally important.

Following his election, he personally committed to the re-establishment of relations between Timor-Leste and Indonesia. In doing so, he helped achieve a level of reconciliation between two nations that might otherwise have experienced ongoing violence and instability. In 2005, he established the Commission of Truth and Friendship: Indonesia-Timor-Leste. The Commission's report, which was endorsed by both President Gusmão and then Indonesian President Yudhoyono, is a rare example of a bilateral 'truth and reconciliation' report. The success of his approach to reconciliation is reflected by the fact that, in 2014, just fifteen years after his release from an Indonesian jail, Mr. Gusmão received Indonesia's highest medal of honour.

Under his leadership, Timor-Leste has also been able to establish ownership of significant energy resources in its territorial waters and, in doing so, establish an economic resource that will help to support the long-term development of one of the world's poorest countries.

Unlike many leaders of revolutionary movements, Mr. Gusmão has also managed to undertake a transition out of political leadership. In 2007, he stepped down as President. To try to help solve the ethnic crisis that arose in 2006/07, he established a political party and became the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste in August 2007. In 2012, his party won the election and he started his second term as Head of the Government. In early 2014, he announced his intention to resign as Prime Minister, to give way to the new generation of leadership. In February 2015, the transition took place and he became Minister of Planning and Strategic Investment. These transitions are almost unparalleled in modern, post-colonial, political history and they present a contrast to a pattern in which the leaders of newly established countries then entrench themselves in long-term political power.