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## Timor-Leste joins worldwide celebration of World Blood Donor Day

Safe Blood saves millions of lives each year. On Saturday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, Timor-Leste joined nations throughout the world in the celebration of World Blood Donor Day to raise awareness about the vital need for safe blood and voluntary blood donations. Each day, 800 mothers die from pregnancy and childbirth related complications – with 99% of these deaths occurring in developing countries. Severe bleeding during delivery and after childbirth is the most common cause of maternal mortality and contributes to around 31% of maternal deaths in Asia. This year the World Blood Donor Day campaign focuses on providing *'safe blood for saving mothers.'*

Timor-Leste has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in South East Asia with 557 deaths per 100,000 live births. There is an urgent need for more people to donate blood on a regular basis to save precious lives and to strengthen blood services nationwide. In Timor-Leste, the majority of blood transfusions are needed for management of pregnancy-related complications. Blood transfusions are also necessary for the treatment of traffic accident injuries, surgical operations and for patients with blood cancer.



Dozens of university students line up to register their details and donate blood on World Blood Donor Day

However, Timor-Leste faces an unstable supply of blood stocks. In 2012, 2400 units of blood were required for transfusion but only 1938 units of blood were collected. The majority of donations that year came from replacement donors (donations from family members of patients that require transfusions). However, for a consistent safe supply of blood, the ideal is for all countries to receive 100% of blood donations from voluntary unpaid donors. All over the world it has been shown that regular, voluntary, non-remunerated donors from low-risk population groups are the safest sources of this precious, life-saving material. In South East Asia, 100% of blood donations are screened for infectious diseases such as hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, and syphilis before further use.

The World Blood Donor Day 2014 event held in Timor Plaza also marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Blood Bank's work in Timor-Leste. This joint celebration was organized by the National Blood Bank, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), Red Cross Timor-Leste (CVTL) and the

Ministry of Health. Over 100 university students, voluntary blood donors, health care workers and senior representatives from WHO, Ministry of Health, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), PNTL, FFDTL and CVTL participated in the event.

During the opening ceremony a special musical performance was made by a beneficiary of regular blood transfusions, recovered cancer patient, Mr. Youngky Kawengian about the life saving gift of blood. During the event members of the public learned about the precious, life saving benefits of blood donation, the quick and painless process of donation itself, and the safety of the procedures involved.



**A university student volunteers to donate blood on World Blood Donor Day at Timor Plaza, June 14<sup>th</sup>**



**Red Cross Timor Leste volunteers attend the World Blood Donor Day**

Following the official launch of World Blood Donor Day 2014, 32 units of blood were donated by members of the public which could be used to help save the lives of up to 100 people. World Blood Donor Day T-shirts, pens and pins were distributed to all those who volunteered to donate blood.

During his speech, Acting WHO Representative, Dr. Rajesh Pandav, reaffirmed WHO's continued support to governments and NGOs to increase the availability of safe blood worldwide. He also spoke of the need to further involve, educate, and empower communities in Timor-Leste to regularly and voluntarily donate blood to meet the national need. "On World Blood Donor Day 2014, WHO is urging countries, to take concrete steps to ensure that health facilities improve access to safe blood and blood products from volunteer donors for women giving birth. This gift of life is the most precious gift one can give to a fellow citizen," stated Dr. Rajesh. WHO is currently provided technical support to the Ministry of Health in developing the country's first National Blood Policy in order to strengthen blood laboratory facilities and services nationwide.



**Sr. Jose dos Reis Magno, Director General, Ministry of Health, Sr. Januario Ximenes, CVTL, Mr. Youngky Kawengian and his wife, Sr. Manuel Mendes, FFDTL Representative, Dr. Rajesh Pandav, Acting WHO Representative and Stuart Bryan, Water and Sanitation Delegate, Australian Red Cross, officially open World Blood Donor Day**