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WCO-TLS/ PR 023/10/13

## World Food Day celebration reaffirms high level commitment to tackle food security and malnutrition in Timor-Leste

On October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, H.E. Taur Matan Ruak and senior government officials attended the World Food Day celebration at Mercado Lama Convention Centre, Dili. They were joined by Heads of UN Agencies, development partners, civil society, NGO's, private sector and members of the public to commemorate this important event.

Each year, World Food Day is celebrated on October 16<sup>th</sup> because this marks the date the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations was founded in 1945. World Food Day honors that day and focuses international attention on defeating hunger worldwide. The theme chosen by Timor-Leste "Healthy People Depend on a Healthy Food System" holds particular relevance. In a country where 80 % of the population work in subsistence agriculture, malnutrition and food security continue to be a major concern. The most recent data from the Demographic Health Survey 2009/ 2010 shows that 58% of children under five are stunted (too short for their age), 45% are underweight and 19% experience wasting (too thin for their height) which is a sign of acute malnutrition.



President of RDTL, H.E. Taur Matan Ruak, Minister for Agriculture and President of CONSSANTIL, H.E. Mariano Assanami Sabino open the celebration of World Food Day

In response to the publication of these results, the Government of Timor-Leste announced the 'Comoro Declaration Against Hunger and Malnutrition' on World Food Day, 2010. This declaration stated that 'everyone has the right to have access to good quality, nutritious food' and reaffirmed the fundamental right of all people to be free from hunger. An inter-ministerial task force was established to tackle malnutrition and food security in the country which became CONSSANTIL, the National Council for Security and Sovereignty of Food and Nutrition in Timor-Leste in 2011.

During his opening address, the President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, H.E. Taur Matan Ruak, praised the establishment of CONSSANTIL and stressed the urgency with which the country's challenges need to be addressed. The President noted that the production of agriculture is far below the country's potential and the needs of the population and that increasing food security is fundamental to

achieving the national goals of improving nutrition, eliminating poverty and ensuring the development of a strong and healthy people.

The participation of government representatives at the highest level during the event demonstrated the priority now given to solving the problems of food insecurity and malnutrition. Ministers from Agriculture and Fisheries, Commerce, Industry and Environment, Health, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Education, Social Solidarity, and State Administration were in attendance, with many invited to give speeches and presentations about their Ministry's contributions and progress.

The President also acknowledged the important contribution made by UN agencies and development partners in tackling malnutrition and food security. The World Food Programme (WFP) supports the Ministry of Health through the provision of specialized nutritious foods, such as Timor Vita, to vulnerable nursing mothers as part of the Mother and Child Health and Nutrition programme. On World Food Day, WFP and Ministry of Health held a joint exhibition to present Timor Vita and give cooking demonstrations on how to prepare nutritious balanced meals. World Health Organization (WHO) provides ongoing technical support to the Ministry of Health on nutrition. WHO are currently drafting guidelines on dietary recommendations for the people of Timor-Leste based on locally available, affordable, nutritious food. The guidelines will be finalized and disseminated early next year.



Inácio dos Santos, WFP field monitor and Mário Moreira, Nutrition Department, Ministry of Health give cooking demonstration at World Food Day, photo by Diana Borges WFP



Norberta dos Reis Belo from a World Vision supported community project in Baucau proudly displays her produce

During the World Food Day celebration, participants were invited to tour exhibition stalls from local NGO's, community groups and Government Ministries. The diversity of the exhibitions reflected the large number of dedicated individuals and organizations working on innovative projects to tackle food security and nutrition in Timor-Leste. The exhibits featured USAID supported horticulture, irrigation and food cultivation projects, EU and World Vision supported community agricultural projects, community groups from Baucau, Maubisse and Ermera selling their coffee, honey and tamarind produce, and many others.

The event provided an opportunity for the most senior political figures, UN Agencies, development partners, NGO's and community groups to reaffirm their commitment to fight hunger and malnutrition. During the World Food Day celebration the Government announced an agreement between Timor-Leste, the United States of America and China to increase national food productivity and potentially increase incomes for farmers. The Government also announced plans to allocate 58 million dollars in 2014 to tackle food security and nutrition through a diverse range of programmes, such as, school meal provision, suco development and supporting local cooperatives and businesses to sell locally made products. Through increased resource mobilization and political will, it is hoped that meaningful progress can be achieved on nutrition and food security in Timor-Leste.