Opening Remarks by H.E. Jesuína Maria Ferreira Gomes
Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Timor-Leste
on the Occasion of
Lecture on the UN System for Human Rights and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by Professor Joshua Cooper
Salão CED-MNEC, Dili; 4 September 2026

Excellencies,
Professor Joshua Cooper,

Distinguished Directors, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a great pleasure to welcome **Professor Joshua Cooper** to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. We are very pleased to have this opportunity to learn from his expertise on the **United Nations System for Human Rights and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**.

For Timor-Leste, human rights have a very special meaning. They are not only principles contained in international conventions or discussed within the United Nations. They are closely connected to our own history as a nation.

Our long struggle for self-determination was fundamentally a struggle for **human dignity, freedom, justice, and the right of our people to determine their own future**. For this reason, the protection and promotion of human rights remain an important foundation of our democratic State.

Our Constitution reflects these values through its strong commitment to human dignity, equality, fundamental freedoms, democratic participation, and respect for the cultural identity of our people.

The discussion on the rights of Indigenous Peoples is also highly relevant to Timor-Leste. Despite our relatively small territory,

we are a country of remarkable **cultural and linguistic diversity**. Across our municipalities, our communities maintain different languages, traditions, customary practices, traditional knowledge, and strong relationships with ancestral lands and natural resources.

These are not simply elements of our past. They remain an important part of our national identity and social life today.

As Timor-Leste continues its development and modernization, we therefore need to consider an important question: **How can we achieve economic and social development while at the same time protecting human dignity, cultural identity, community rights, and our traditional heritage?**

This question becomes increasingly important when we discuss issues such as **land and natural resources, environmental protection, development projects, access to justice, preservation of local languages and cultural heritage, and the participation of communities in decisions that affect their lives**.

Human rights must also be inclusive. Particular attention must continue to be given to the meaningful participation and protection of **women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, rural communities, and other vulnerable groups**, ensuring that development reaches everyone and leaves no one behind.

For us at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, today's discussion has another important dimension: **diplomacy**.

Our diplomats and officials represent Timor-Leste before the United Nations and other international and regional institutions. We therefore need a strong understanding not only of human rights principles, but also of how the international human rights system actually works—its institutions, mechanisms, reporting processes, and how Member States engage with them.

As Timor-Leste continues to strengthen its international and regional engagement, our diplomats must be prepared to communicate our national experience, defend our interests, fulfil our international commitments, and contribute constructively to global discussions on human rights.

At the same time, Timor-Leste also has an experience worth sharing. Our journey from conflict to peace, from occupation to self-determination, and from resistance to democratic state-building demonstrates the importance of **dialogue, reconciliation, human dignity, and international solidarity**.

I therefore encourage all participants to make full use of this opportunity. Please engage actively with Professor Cooper, ask questions, exchange perspectives, and consider how the principles and mechanisms discussed today can contribute to our work as public officials and diplomats.

Professor Cooper, thank you very much for being with us and for sharing your knowledge and experience with our officials.

I wish Professor Cooper and all participants a very productive and enriching discussion.

Thank you very much.

Obrigada barak.