



PRESS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE

25 JULY 1983

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EAST TIMOR CHURCH LEADER SAYS RESISTANCE TO INDONESIA REMAINS STRONG

The former leader of the Roman Catholic Church in East Timor said recently that the resistance movement against the Indonesian occupation enjoyed 'the sympathy of the whole people', and had recently reorganised. Mgr Martinho da Costa Lopes, interviewed recently in Portugal, spoke of the cease-fire agreed in March between the Indonesian forces and the FRETILIN guerrillas. He said that the cease-fire proposal had come from the Indonesians and perhaps reflected the exhaustion and low morale of their troops after nearly eight years of war.

Mgr Lopes admitted that he had been advised to resign by the Vatican's diplomatic representative in Jakarta, pro-nuncio Mgr Pablo Puente. Asked about reports that the request for his resignation had been the result of Indonesian pressure on the Vatican, Mgr Lopes said that it would have been 'normal' for the Indonesian authorities 'to have pulled strings and used influence to get me out' after his consistent criticism of Indonesian actions in East Timor since their invasion in December 1975. Priests in East Timor had written to the Pope and to the bishops of the world in protest against his removal, he said.

In London the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) announced today that the Indonesians had failed to confirm an invitation to CIIR to send a team of experts to East Timor. The team, which would have left for East Timor today, included a doctor with experience of developing countries, an agricultural expert, a lawyer with considerable experience of South-East Asia and a linguist who speaks two Timorese languages. CIIR believes that the visit would have been the first since the Indonesian invasion by an independent team capable of making an informed assessment of conditions in East Timor. Previous visits to the territory have either been too short or have lacked technical support.

CIIR is unconvinced by the Indonesian claim that they did not have enough time to make arrangements for the visit, since the original invitation was extended in April 1982. The behaviour of the Indonesian authorities strengthens CIIR's conviction that, until the Indonesian authorities permit independent and qualified people to visit East Timor for sufficient time to gain an objective picture of the situation, international concern remains justified.

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Attached: interview with Mgr Martinho da Costa Lopes, former Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Dili (East Timor).

FURTHER INFORMATION: Robert Archer 01-354 0883

Interview with Mgr Martinho da Costa Lopes, recently resigned Apostolic Administrator of Dili, East Timor

Text from Diario de Noticias and Libertar, Oporto and Lisbon, July 1983.

Q. Monsignor, the Washington Center for Defense Information puts the war in East Timor in the second category among wars which have caused the most deaths recently, just after Pol Pot's Cambodia, but before Afghanistan and the war between Iraq and Iran and Lebanon. What does that mean for the people of East Timor?

R. IN MY VIEW IT SHOWS FIRST THE EXTREME BRUTALITY OF THE WAR WHICH BROKE OUT ALMOST EIGHT YEARS AGO IN THE PEACEFUL ISLAND OF EAST TIMOR, WITH ITS TRAIL OF ATROCITIES, RUIN, VIOLENCE OF EVERY SORT, TORTURES, MASSACRES, AND THE GENOCIDE INFLICTED ON THE HEROIC AND MARTYRED PEOPLE OF EAST TIMOR.

Q. I know, Monsignor, that you defended you people against Indonesian attacks.

R. AS FAR AS POSSIBLE. TIMOR IS AN ABANDONED NATION, A NATION WHICH HAS SUFFERED ENORMOUSLY. I COULD NOT REMAIN SILENT IN THE FACE OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. I HAS A MISSION TO DEFEND THIS POOR NATION WHICH HAD BEEN ABANDONED TO ITS SUFFERING.

Q. Did you speak out in homilies and in public?

R. I SPOKE IN PUBLIC, IN HOMILIES AND BEFORE A GATHERING OF 12 000 PEOPLE.

Q. What did the Indonesian army think of these actions?
ME TO TALK MUCH ABOUT

R. THEY DIDN'T LIKE IT. THEY DIDN'T LIKE THE ATROCITIES AND VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS. OBVIOUSLY THEY FELT ATTACKED.

Q. Were you ever afraid that you were taking risks or that you might have to pay for your outspokenness with your life?

R. NO, NO.

Q. Did you ever receive death threats?

R. THREATS, YES. BUT WHEN WE ARE FIGHTING FOR AN IDEAL WE ARE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING, EVEN FOR DEATH. WE ARE BORN TO DIE. IT IS WORTH WHILE TO DIE FOR A NOBLE CAUSE.

Q. Did this cost you your position as Apostolic Administrator?

R. CERTAINLY IT DID.

Q. Presumably Indonesia brought to bear all possible pressures to get you removed.

A. I HAVE NO EVIDENCE OF THAT BUT I THINK IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NORMAL FOR THEM TO HAVE DONE SOMETHING TO GET ME OFF THEIR BACKS, TO HAVE PULLED STRINGS AND USED INFLUENCE TO GET ME OUT. THEY KNEW THAT THAT DIDN'T DEPEND ON ME BUT ON THE VATICAN. IT IS NATURAL THAT THEY SHOULD CONSIDER ME PERSONA NON GRATA....

Q. When you spoke to the people of Timor, did you feel you had their support?

A. OF COURSE.

Q. Was your departure a great blow to them?

A. YES. THE LETTERS THEY WROTE TO THE HOLY FATHER AND THOSE THE PRIESTS WROTE TO THE BISHOPS ARE PROOF.

Q. Did you ever take part in meetings of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference?

A. YES, NOT AS A FULL MEMBER BUT SIMPLY AS AN OBSERVER.

Q. But that was a de facto recognition of the incorporation of your diocese into the Indonesian church.

A. The nuncio, Pablo Puente, advised me to attend....

Q. Was fighting for your people worth while?

A. YES. I FOUGHT AS LONG AS I COULD AND AS LONG AS THE VATICAN KEPT ME IN THE DIOCESE....

Q. Would the Timorese church be happy to accept incorporation into the Indonesian church?

A. NO. THE CHURCH CAN'T TAKE THE FIRST STEP. THE CHURCH, IN MY VIEW, MUST FOLLOW THE FATE OF ITS PEOPLE. IF THE PEOPLE WANT INTEGRATION, THE CHURCH WILL ACCEPT. IF THE PEOPLE OF TIMOR WANT INDEPENDENCE, THE CHURCH MUST ACCEPT THAT DESIRE.

Q. But has ^{not} the Vatican, by accepting your resignation, implicitly taken the first step towards incorporation?

A. NO, I DON'T THINK SO. THOSE ARE JUST ~~HYPOTHESES~~ HYPOTHESES. THE TRUTH IS THIS: I WAS TIRED AND I OFFERED MY RESIGNATION, AND THE HOLY FATHER ACCEPTED IT.

Q. But was it suggested to you that you should offer your resignation?

A. I WAS ADVISED TO AND I DID.....

Q. Was the tiredness you mentioned the result of not being able to visit your diocese regularly?

A. NO, NOT EXACTLY. IT IS MAINLY THE RESULT OF THE INNUMERABLE PROBLEMS I HAD TO GET INVOLVED IN BECAUSE THERE WAS NOBODY. EVERYTHING CAME BACK TO ME. THE PEOPLE HAD UNLIMITED CONFIDENCE IN ME. AND OF COURSE I LIVED IN THAT STATE OF NERVOUS TENSION.

Q. Were you able to visit the diocese freely?

A. YES.

Q. How did you visit it? By car?

A. DURING THE FIRST TWO YEARS (1977-79) I TRAVELLED BY HELICOPTER. BUT THAT MEANT THAT I COULDN'T MAKE DETOURS TO VISIT OTHER COMMUNITIES OR MISSION STATIONS, SO I STARTED TO USE A JEEP.....

Q. Didn't the Indonesian invasion disrupt the missions?

A. AT THE BEGINNING, YES. IN CERTAIN TOWNS THE POPULATION FLED TO THE BUSH WITH THE GUERRILLAS, THOUGH OTHERS STAYED. OBVIOUSLY, WHEN CHURCHES WERE DESTROYED LIFE COULDN'T CONTINUE NORMALLY. THERE WAS NO WINE OR HOSTS FOR MASS. THOSE WHO LIVED NEAR THE CAPITAL CAME TO DILI; THOSE WHO WERE AT A DISTANCE STAYED IN THE BUSH FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

Q. Could you communicate directly with the Vatican?

A. YES, BY GOING THROUGH THE NUNCIATURE IN JAKARTA. IF YOU SEND A LETTER BY THE NORMAL MEANS IT IS CENSORED AND IN THE END IT IS DESTROYED. MY CORRESPONDENCE FOR THE NUNCIATURE WAS CARRIED BY A PERSON I TRUSTED WHO USED TO GO TO JAKARTA.

Q. It seems to me that the nuncio made a diplomatic error in asking you to resign.

A. I DON'T KNOW. I CAN'T SAY. ONLY HE COULD SAY.

Q. The nuncio didn't experience the beginning of the invasion of Timor, did he?

A. NO.

Q. Is that why he has a different view?

A. IT'S NATURAL THAT HE SHOULD HAVE A DIFFERENT VIEW OF THE PROBLEMS OF TIMOR.

Q. How can such a small diocese have enough moral resistance to survive?

A. HUMANLY SPEAKING IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO EXPLAIN. THE DIOCESE OF DILI ISN'T A HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT. IT'S THE WORK OF GOD.

Q. Do you think that the new Apostolic Administrator, who's young and timid, will manage to stand up to the pressures of the situation?

A. HUMANLY SPEAKING HE CAN'T. WITH THE HELP OF GOD EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

Q. How was Mgr Ximenes chosen? Did the pro-nuncio know him?

A. OF COURSE. THE PRO-NUNCIO TOLD ROME HE WAS CAPABLE. A NUMBER OF PEOPLE WERE CONSULTED AND HE WAS APPOINTED.... THERE WERE MANY NATIVE TIMORESE PRIESTS WITH ABILITY AND A GOOD INTELLECTUAL AND APOSTOLIC PREPARATION. THEY WERE NOT VERY PLEASED BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT CONSULTED ABOUT THIS REPLACEMENT, AND SINCE THEY HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED THEY FELT LEFT OUT OF THE PROCESS. THEY SAID, 'HERE'S A YOUNG LAD JUST OUT OF THE SEMINARY COMING TO RUN THE DIOCESE OVER OUR HEADS.' IT'S HUMAN NATURE... MGR XIMENES WAS NOT ~~XXX~~ WELL RECEIVED.

Q. Was it because he had an Indonesian passport that he was chosen?

A. THE ONLY WAY HE COULD GO BACK TO TIMOR WAS TO APPLY FOR INDONESIAN NATIONALITY. I ONLY FOUND THAT OUT VERY RECENTLY. OBVIOUSLY IT'S SOMETHING THE PEOPLE WON'T LIKE MUCH.

Q. Does the ⁿuncio in Jakarta get in touch directly with the Timorese clergy?

A. HE HAS BEEN THERE TWICE. THE SECOND TIME [After the appointment of the new Apostolic administrator, Translator] TO CONTACT THE CLERGY AND DIALOGUE WITH THEM. BUT WHAT DIALOGUE COULD THERE BE IF HE WAS GOING TO ENFORCE ORDERS?

Q. How did the transfer of authority go?

A. IT TOOK PLACE AT A CONCELEBRATED MASS ATTENDED BY TWO TIMORESE PRIESTS AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CLERGY. THE OTHERS REFUSED TO ATTEND AS A SIGN OF PROTEST. THE FOREIGN PRIESTS ATTENDED THE TRANSFER. BUT THE PRIESTS WERE SINCERE. THEY TOLD THE NUNCIO THAT THEY WOULDN'T GO TO THE INSTALLATION AS A GESTURE OF PROTEST AGAINST MY REPLACEMENT.

Q. In the audience he granted you did the Pope show awareness of the tragedy of Timor?

A. GREAT AWARENESS. IT WAS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO ME. I WAS GETTING READY TO SPEAK IN ENGLISH, BUT THE POPE TOLD ME TO SPEAK IN PORTUGUESE BECAUSE TODAY IT IS A LANGUAGE SPOKEN BY 150 MILLION PEOPLE.

Q. When the Pope goes to Indonesia in 1984, will he visit Timor too?

A. I DON'T KNOW. ONLY GOD KNOWS....

Q. Do you think that the universal church is more aware of the problem of Timor today than a few years ago?

A. I CAN'T ANSWER THAT BECAUSE I HAVEN'T ENOUGH INFORMATION. WHAT I FOUND WAS THE LACK OF THAT PRESENCE OF THE CHURCHES. OUT THERE WE WERE ISOLATED.

Q. What news of the church and the world did you receive?

A. LITTLE OR NONE. THE OSSERVATORE ROMANO IN PORTUGUESE AND NOTHING ELSE.

Q. Was it painful to live like that?

A. OF COURSE, THOUGH WE ALSO HAD A CERTAIN HOPE.

Q. After seven and a half years of unequal struggle, FRETILIN continues ~~xxxxxxkxxxxxxkxxxxxxkxxxxxxkxxxxxxk~~ its armed campaign - without outside help. But aren't they, as the Indonesian government says, a small group of about 100 guerrillas, completely isolated?

A. IN 1981 THE WAR INTENSIFIED AND THE INDONESIANS LAUNCHED A LARGE-SCALE MILITARY OPERATION. EVEN BY THEN THEY HADN'T SUCCEEDED IN CRUSHING THE GUERRILLA FORCES, AND IF THE NUMBER OF ARMED GUERRILLAS HAS NOW REACHED 8 600, AS THE BBC SAID RECENTLY, I DON'T THINK IT WILL BE EASY TO ELIMINATE THESE FORCES QUICKLY, ESPECIALLY AS THEY ARE NOW REORGANISED AND DISPERSED THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND.

Q. Do you think a FRETILIN government would be viable in Timor?

A. VIABLE, I DON'T KNOW. ALL THE PARTIES ARE DEAD. FRETILIN IS THE ONLY GROUP FIGHTING FOR THE PEOPLE, AND THAT EARNS IT THE SYMPATHY OF THE WHOLE PEOPLE. FRETILIN SYMBOLISES THE PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE, AN ORGANISED RESISTANCE.

Q. Letters coming from Timor, especially since 1981, claim that FRETILIN is growing in strength, and that the Indonesians feel they have lost the war. In your view does that correspond to the facts?

A. I THINK SO.

Q. The Portugues press says there has been an agreement with Indonesia. Is that true?

A. AFTER SO LONG A WAR INDONESIA MAY HAVE FELT THE NEED FOR A PERIOD OF TRUCE. IT PROPOSED THIS TO FRETILIN, WHO ACCEPTED.

Q. Is this cease-fire connected with the decline in the morale of the Indonesian soldiers?

A. I'M NOT SURE. ONLY THE INDONESIANS COULD SAY.... BUT IT IS USEFUL TO REMEMBER THAT IN 1981, NEAR BAZARTETE, A FEW KILOMETRES FROM DILI, MANY INDONESIAN SOLDIERS HANDED OVER THEIR WEAPONS TO FRETILIN AND CATEGORICALLY REFUSED TO CONTINUE FIGHTING. THEY WERE ALL SENTENCED BY AN AD HOC MILITARY COURT SET UP SPECIALLY.

Q. Is FRETILIN's ideology marxist?

A. I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S MARXIST OR NOT. WHAT I DO KNOW IS THAT THEY WANT INDEPENDENCE AND THE PEOPLE DON'T THINK ABOUT MARXISM. WHAT THEY WANT IS TO BE FREE AND INDEPENDENT AND GOVERN THEMSELVES LIKE OTHER LITTLE PACIFIC ISLANDS.

Q. Isn't it true that Indonesia invaded Timor to protect itself against communism?

A. THEY SAY THAT, BUT I DON'T FIND THAT ARGUMENT VERY LOGICAL. IF THEY WANTED TO FIGHT COMMUNISM, THEY SHOULD HAVE HELPED US TO FIGHT IT. BUT TO SAY THEY'RE FIGHTING COMMUNISM IN ORDER TO DO WHAT THEY WANT WITH US, OH NO! THEY SAY THEY ARE OUR BROTHERS AND THEY COME TO TIMOR AND STEAL THINGS, RAPE OUR WIVES AND DAUGHTERS. WHAT KIND OF BROTHERHOOD IS THAT?

Q. Apart from the military activity, are there any other signs of resistance among the people to the integration of East Timor into Indonesia?

A. THE PEOPLE OF TIMOR LOVE THEIR LAND AND ARE DEEPLY NATIONALISTIC. DESPITE ALL THE RESTRICTIONS THEY HAVE DISPLAYED AN EXTRAORDINARY PASSIVE RESISTANCE WHICH HAS AMAZED THE WORLD.

Q. Do you still hope that there will be a referendum in Timor to allow the people to choose their destiny?

A. THAT WOULD BE THE ONLY LEGITIMATE WAY IN WHICH THE PEOPLE COULD INDICATE WHAT THEY WANT. A REFERNDUM FREE FROM ALL PRESSURE, INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL.

Q. Have you got relatives here in Portugal?

A. NO, NONE. I HAVE FRIENDS.

Q. Don't you mind living like that far from your family?

A. AS MISSIONARIES AND PRIESTS WE'RE USED TO LIVING LIKE THAT.

Q. Sometimes life brings many changes, Monsignor.

A. YES, BUT THAT'S PART OF THE PROCESS OF LIFE ITSELF. IT HAS ITS UPS AND DOWNS, ITS SUFFERINGS AND JOYS. I'M GLAD TO HAVE BEEN RELIEVED OF AN ENORMOUS BURDEN. I THINK I'VE EARNED A LITTLE REST AFTER THIS TENSION.

Q. Have you left Timor with no hope of returning?

A. NO HOPE, AT LEAST AS LONG AS THE PRESENT SITUATION LASTS.

Q. Would Indonesia not let you return?

A. I DON'T THINK SO. PEOPLE WHO COME TO PORTUGAL CAN'T GO BACK.

Q. If a particular Timorese had supported Indonesian policy, would you have been hostile to such a person?

A. NO. IF THEY CHOSE INDONESIA IT'S BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THEY'D DO BETTER FOR THEMSELVES AND RECEIVE A POLITICAL POSITION. THAT'S THEIR BUSINESS.

Q. You seem so calm. Why have the Indonesians brought so much pressure to bear on you?

A. BECAUSE I DEVOTED A LOT OF ENERGY TO DEFENDING THE TIMORESE, JUST AS I WOULD HAVE DEFENDED ANY PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN ABANDONED OR BEEN THE VICTIMS OF INJUSTICE.

ENDS.