



## Global Peacebuilding Association

特定非営利活動法人 日本国際平和構築協会

H.E. Mr. José Ramos-Horta

Former President of Timor-Leste and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

### *Online Conversation on Myanmar, COVID-19, and the New World*

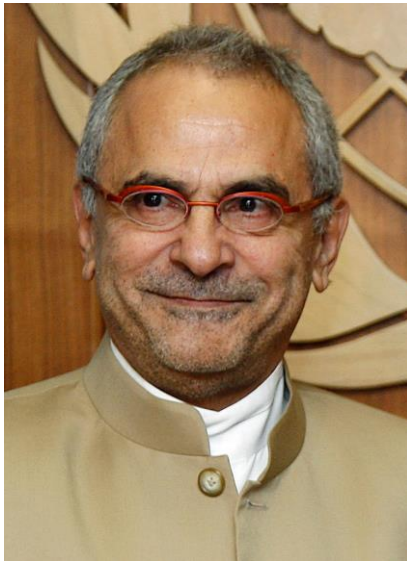
The Kyoto Peacebuilding Center (KPC),

Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan (GPAJ) and

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Report compiled by: Maciej Witek



#### **Part 1: General Overview**

Mr. Ramos-Horta started his presentation by stating that since February, the entire society of Myanmar had been living through an extreme level of violence and fear. It is for the people of Myanmar that we must show loyalty. He was also concerned, how leaders of ASEAN who in the past had welcomed Aung Suu Kyi in their own countries or visited in Myanmar and were welcomed by her, suddenly do not invoke her name during the meetings.

It happened in the past when Anwar Ibrahim was in jail, Mr. Ramos-Horta was the only foreign minister in the ASEAN region, who at least behind the scenes, pushed for his well-being and release. He was saddened that ASEAN leaders were silent and not openly calling for Aung San Suu Kyi release. She was the elected leader (in 2012, 2015 and 2020), with an even bigger majority, and could not be ignored along with the newly elected parliament.

ASEAN is facing a major political-diplomatic storm, what's happening in Myanmar is a challenge to its centrality and ethical leadership. The international community surely understands the extraordinary difficulties ASEAN leaders face, ASEAN founding Charter is not based on the same principles, same values, similar demands to those of the European or African Union. In Africa for example, if there is a coup,

membership of the country concerned is immediately suspended, and comprehensive sanctions are activated by both the African Union and European Union, both firmly adhering to the zero tolerance principle on military coups.

Asia is the one region in the world that faces the most extraordinary, sometimes impossible challenges, very dangerous risks, as tensions escalate between China and India, tensions in South China Sea and East China Sea, and many other unresolved border disputes. It is in Asia where we have the most communist dictatorships and the most nuclearised neighbors.

ASEAN is a world's leading organization, much respected, but it should also be able to resolve regional problems, especially when military snipers shoot in cold blood civilians, teenagers, the military storm into people's homes and kill randomly, when aircrafts bomb villages along the Myanmar-Thai border, etc. This should be a matter of international concern to which the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is applied. ASEAN should have the courage to say "enough is enough" to Myanmar.

As a member of the international community, Japan is a critical partner in peacemaking in the region and globally, it has to be more forceful. According to Mr. Ramos-Horta, Japan cannot allow itself to be lectured again and again on the past, namely what Japan did during World War II, to stay silent. We are living in the XXI century, history has been written, Japan cannot allow itself to be always intimidated because of its past history. It has to be more outspoken, associate itself with the United Nations and the European Union in order to put pressure on Myanmar military leaders. We are in XXI century, and what is happening in the heart of Southeast Asia is unacceptable.

Having explained his views on Myanmar situation, Mr. Ramos-Horta urged the international community to:

1. continue to recognize the elected government and its embassies and envoys, provide funding for these embassies to function, and
2. expand sanctions and identify where the military has stashed the money away in such countries as Singapore, Thailand, and China. 90% of Myanmar's economy is already paralyzed because of the military.

Mr. Ramos-Horta then stated that never before in Southeast Asia he had witnessed a movement as encompassing as the one in Myanmar. How even children, teenagers, movie stars, doctors, academics, farmers, all are engaged in the fight for democracy and how they are all everybody paying a heavy price. Our regional community cannot pretend that the military is legitimate. It is also an absolute absurdity and extreme hypocrisy that the military are accusing Suu Kyi of corruption. If anybody should go on trial for corruption, that should be the Tatmadaw, for their 60 years of robbery of the country.

Mr. Ramos-Horta stated that in terms of the global fight against COVID-19, the US is finally showing leadership, President Biden has not disappointed the international community. Since the beginning of the pandemic last year, leaders of G7 and G20 agreed to lift copyright rules, allow for patents and technology to be more available, but unfortunately, this takes time. In the meantime, richer countries should donate their

excess vaccine to others, and follow the example European Union and the United States who are already doing that. Japan recently had a meeting with the president of COVAX, José Manuel Barroso, and it was announced that the target of 10 billion dollars to purchase vaccines for developing countries has been met.

If the international community doesn't expand partnership and solidarity to defeat this pandemic it is going to continue and overwhelm everyone in the world, big, small, rich and poor countries, no one will be spared.

Mr. Ramos-Horta also described briefly the current situation in Timor-Leste, stating that the country is also being affected but it has been performing better than many others. The vaccination campaign had started, and up to now, 7% of the population received the vaccine. ( Note: update figure, over 50% have received the first dose and 7% the second dose. It is expected that by December 2021, 80% of the adult population will have received the two doses of Astra-Zeneca vaccine, supplied mostly by Australia.

Timor-Leste also received 100,000 vaccines from China, but the priority is to continue with vaccines already received from Australia and New Zealand. There were no issues with the vaccine reported, and COVID19 mortality is low, few cases, and most had multiple prior medical problems, diabetes, heart attacks, etc. With more than 18 billion dollars in its fund, Timor-Leste is fully capable of purchase vaccines.

At the end of his presentation, Mr. Ramos-Horta expressed his gratitude to all participants who attended the meeting and his hope that they will spread awareness about the situation in Myanmar by reaching out to their countries, governments, parliaments, and media. "Not to betray the youth, and democrats of Myanmar," he said.

## **Part 2: Discussion**

The following section is a summary of the dialogue-based discussion between participants and Mr. Ramos-Horta. It contains a description of questions, followed by detailed answers.

### **Sukehiro Hasegawa, President, Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan:**

In starting the discussion, Mr. Hasegawa referred to a resolution adopted by the House of Representatives of the Diet of Japan that condemned the military coup of Myanmar as an "act to trample on efforts and expectations for democratization" and called on the Japanese government to "make full use of all diplomatic resources and every effort to realize" the restoration of democracy in Myanmar. He then asked for Mr. Ramos-Horta's views on what Japan can and should do apart from adopting the resolution.

### **Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta's Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta advised that he "would begin with sanctions, any bilateral, economic, financial assistance on the part of Japan to Myanmar, should be cancel off completely. Any international financial institution that Japan is involved with, that might have a loan to Myanmar, cancel off with them, freeze any project. We are

asking to use non-lethal, non-military means, asking Japan to use moral equivalent and those are financial-economic sanctions. If it's done by everyone, you will bring the military to their knees.”

**Sukehiro Hasegawa, President, Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan:**

Mr. Hasegawa noted that the Tatmadaw received the Chinese ambassador, and there was a media report that now China and Russia were accepting the Tatmadaw as de facto government. Many realistic Japanese policymakers feel that if Japan introduced sanctions, and take a very hard ax on Myanmar, it would drive them to China and Russia.

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta's Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta said that China will pay a price as there had been already demonstrations by Burmese people in front of the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar and attacking Chinese economic interest in the country. If China persisted in supporting Tatmadaw, there will be consequences. Because in the end, the military will give up, the situation today is not the same as 20 years ago. It is hugely costly for the people, but they are prepared to bear the brunt. Sooner or later the military will lose power. If they don't, ASEAN and its credibility will be very diminished as a regional organization. With the military in charge, would ASEAN be able to conduct dialogue with the United States or European Union? In this case, China will pay the price. China which intends to be a global leader has to live with certain principles. They have to be able to understand people's movements and respect the people. As it is, China seems to be completely insensitive towards what is going on in Myanmar, and maybe they will exploit the situation, but if so, there will be a backlash in Myanmar.



**Tadamichi Yamamoto, SRSR in Afghanistan and Ambassador to UNESCO:**

Thanking Mr. Ramos-Horta for making a clear indication about where the situation is, Mr. Yamamoto noted “we cannot just go on and let the situation fester. At some point, the issue of principles involved will come around. We see the importance of the issues of principles in the current discussion of the G7 Summit meeting in the UK, when the countries took up the issue seriously as one of their main topics, focusing on the concept of freedom and democracy. When we think about Myanmar, we have to think about the future of ASEAN, Asia, and the expedient solution of having a dialogue might not actually be the best option. I think we should be very clear about where we want to go. I have no particular good solution for resolving the situation, so as you say it may be that people have to persevere for some time until we find the right approach until China, Russia and Tatmadaw understands that they cannot go on like this. But that is not very easy. I wonder what we could really do to make the first step? If ASEAN cannot prove to be effective in making the initial steps, then I think there should be others who can take those steps, perhaps with cooperation with other countries. I think that Japan is perhaps one of the candidates to take that initiative calling out on

some key members of ASEAN, in collaboration with the UN and other countries from the region and beyond. So there is an effort that points to the future with the principle of human rights and democracy clearly in mind but with pragmatic considerations. I wonder for instance if you might want to start non-governmental efforts gathering the views and support of the international leaders of standing and influence? That could be very important.”



**Takahiro Shinyo, former Japanese Ambassador to the United Nations and Germany:**

Mr. Shinyo agreed with Mr. Ramos-Horta that Tatmadaw is only buying time. What ASEAN should do is of course to nominate the special envoy as soon as possible. In his opinion, Indonesia is quite ready, but other ASEAN countries might not be. This is exactly the issue, what about ASEAN centrality? It is now the time for ASEAN to move forward very rapidly. Outside pressure should not be limited. China is of course abusing this time, and the democratic countries must move together, it would be the right time for G7 countries to move ahead. There are of course limitations for the

Japanese government, and Mr. Shinyo thought it was easy to talk about sanctions, but very difficult to be done. There is a need for UN resolutions, legal background based on Japanese law, when Japanese government goes with sanction. It is of course necessary for the government and parliament to move together. “I would like to say that this trend of pressurizing people, abusing human rights, it is a world trend, not only Myanmar but also China, and maybe Russia must be held responsible. We have seen Hong Kong; we have seen enough. It is a global issue, it is a confrontation between democratic and authoritarian countries, and we need more world politicians to address that issue.”



**Yasushi Akashi, Former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations for Disarmament, Humanitarian Affairs, and Public Information, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Cambodia and Former Yugoslavia:**

Recognizing that President Ramos-Horta had made it clear in which direction we should move in the case of Myanmar, he was pleased to note that the House of Representatives of the Diet had pronounced the general moral position which the majority of Japanese people would be supporting. Mr.

Akashi then explained the cautious approach of the Japanese government in terms of its historical experiences, of how Japan acted adventurously during WWII, dominated by military expansionist elements. He was interested to see how forces were coming together to construct a general political framework to resolve the situation in Myanmar. ASEAN is now struggling, but perhaps more democratic elements will become the majority within the regional organization. In the case of Cambodia, it took about three years, to agree on a general political solution which was reflected in the peace agreements signed in Paris in October 1991, by

20 countries, including 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council, not just ASEAN, but also most of the regional powers like Australia, India and Japan. Each conflict is unique, but perhaps experience from Cambodia might be a good guide for all of us. He added that “I do not think China is opting for a separatist move. China is too wise and too realistic to do that.” He also said that UNTAC (UN transitional Authority in Cambodia) was an elaborate mechanism combining military and civilian elements assuring delicate compromise toward democracy in Cambodian style.

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta’s Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta noted that it is absolutely necessary that Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, the European Union, the United States, and other like-minded countries, work in steps with each other. There have to be consultations on what steps should be taken, and they might not be taken simultaneously. Countries have to make effort to coordinate with other like-minded states, so their position is much stronger. At the same time, it is crucial to reach out to countries in ASEAN, pushing Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore to act together. Mr. Ramos-Horta stated that it is not an easy task, but he is optimistic about the potential resolution. When the military realizes they are hurting their interest, when China realizes they are hurting their credibility, there will be a possibility for real dialogue involving the military and elected people of Myanmar. There is a new development in Myanmar, the nationality all felt betrayed by Suu Kyi and others throughout the democratic transitions of the last 5, 7 years. But now through the democratic movement, the people of Myanmar are united and as long as they stay together, in one common front, Tatmadaw will think twice before prolonging the situation. There is a danger, the more this conflict goes on, the more it will destabilize the entire region. There are radical elements in Myanmar, particularly in the Rakhine state, in Bangladesh, and elsewhere who would eventually seek external support.



**Janelle Saffin, Member of Parliament, Parliament of New South Wales:**

Ms. Saffin stated that a lot of countries are silent. In her opinion, Magnitsky sanctions mentioned by Mr. Ramos-Horta, are important. She also suggested appointing someone, like president Ramos-Horta as a Civil Envoy, drawn from and supported by this group of Eminent persons, to work for a period of time with all of these countries, and try to resolve the issues. The international community comes together, talk about it, and then go away, therefore, sustained advocacy is what Myanmar needs. There is a need to back CRPH, the People’s Parliament, the NUG, the National Unity Government, do everything possible to legitimize them and delegitimize General Min Aung Hlaing and the state administration council. Talking about like-minded countries, Ms. Saffin stated that Japan has a key role to play, it can be stronger, but sustained advocacy is crucial.



**Lise Howard, President, Academic Council on the United Nations System:**

Thanking all the participants for having that conversation, Ms. Howard noted that what she is seeing in Africa, is a growing competition between France and Russia on the continent and elsewhere in the world between the US and China. The echoes of the cold war are ringing in many places in the world right now, it is troubling to see many internal disputes starting to looking elsewhere for support and finding it in different democratic and authoritarian regimes. “Is it possible to revert what seems to be a new trend, of internationalized civil wars?”

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta’s Response:**

In response, Mr. Ramos-Horta stated that yes, it is a very dangerous trend. China desires to expand its ability to have an almost unlimited movement in the entire South China Sea. Unlike the US with unlimited open seas, China is not that fortunate. In the area there are many countries, there is Myanmar which China was always very interested in, to develop strategic cooperation and gain access to the Indian Ocean. The way China handles the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, is very alarming for the countries in the region. But at the same time, it is negative for China because the more China takes a position of assertiveness, or aggressiveness, it will get more and more difficult to gain friends. Looking at the map of Asia, China has very few friends that it can rely on with shared values. China has to be extra careful and if it wants to be respected as a global leader, it has to know how to use soft power. China has not yet learned how to be a superpower. It is not possible to maintain that status only through military force, that is what USSR tried and collapsed.

**Sukehiro Hasegawa, President, Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan:**

Referring to the statement about China not yet ready to be a superpower, Mr. Hasegawa asked if there is a way that they can learn it?

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta’s Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta stated that COVID-19 began in Wuhan, it could happen anywhere, and it is very natural for a country like Australia to support the scientific investigation. China reacted so strongly and introduced economic sanctions against Australia. China has to know how to refrain itself, otherwise, it loses friends. One consequence of COVID is that China will lose in some ways. The world was very dependent on medical equipment from China, and it is already changing. Some is moving to Indonesia, some to the US and other countries. Chinese growth was a result of stability in the region and China needs to learn how to maintain it.



**Ken Inoue, Vice-President, Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan:**

Mr. Inoue was curious about the Myanmar representation to the UN General Assembly, what its prospect. He believes that new democratic government should represent Myanmar but does not know whether it is possible. In connection with COVID-19, some people say that authoritarian regime can handle that pandemic better, but he believes it is not a matter of the regime, but the matter of leadership.

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta's Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta responded by noting that the government who wants to attend the general assembly has to present their credential to the Secretary-General. His advice is that consistent with the past practices, the Secretary and General Assembly must reject the credentials of Tatmadaw. Under the apartheid regime, South Africa was a member state of the UN, but every year beginning in 1974, the credential for the apartheid regime was always rejected by the committee. In the case of the Cambodian regime, because of the cold war, different interests at the time, the US and Europe all refused to recognize the de facto regime that replaced the Khmer Rouge. Mr. Ramos-Horta believes that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will refuse to receive the credentials from any new envoy from Tatmadaw. He also noted that he is very disappointed with the foreign office of the UK, which made excuse to accept the credentials of the new ambassador nominated by the military. Sovereign states are entitled to do what they want based on their conviction or their principles, however, we are all under moral obligation and international law, to only recognize the credentials of the elected government.

**Sukehiro Hasegawa, President, Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan:**

Mr. Hasegawa asked if there is anything that China can do to change it.

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta's Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta stated that China will always look after its immediate interest. Often they miscalculate, a few months from now things will change, and they might regret it.

**Sukehiro Hasegawa, President, Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan:**

Mr. Hasegawa asked if it means, that China can be flexible?

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta's Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta replied that yes, in his opinion China can change, and be very flexible. He has great admiration for China and believes it is regrettable that the trade war with the US is continuing. He hopes that they could separate the issue of COVID-19 and the trade relations, and try to focus on where they could agree,



and that is Myanmar. In the grand scheme of things, in the relation between the US and China, Myanmar is not something that threatened their overall relationship, so they could cooperate. To release all the elected political people, let them free, engage in dialogue, find a compromise.



**Olivia Wellesley-Cole, Rotary Peace Fellow, International Christian University:**

Ms. Wellesley-Cole had two questions. First: “It is noted that some members of community resistance, joined or are planning to join the different armed groups such as the KIA, KNU. Do you think this is a good way of resolving the issue?”

Second: “You mentioned that this is a situation of R2P. In this case even if the Myanmar citizens are asking for R2P, it would be extremely difficult because the *Tatmadaw* is still in power. My question is, how do you think it could be implemented and which countries could get involved? Thank

you for this opportunity.”

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta’s Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta replied that in the case of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), it is absolutely right, the situation in Myanmar fits completely in the criteria for R2P. Usually, situations give rights to R2P if the entire country collapsed, the state’s institutions and army collapsed and there is an ongoing civil war. In the case of Myanmar, the army is there, fully functioning, with massive support from two major powers: China and Russia. Russia sees an opportunity, not so much strategic interest, it primarily sees an opportunity to annoy the US, make life difficult to the US. And also economic, to obtain business and financial interest in Myanmar. Chinese strategic interest was always access to the Indian Ocean through Myanmar. He does not know if the Security Council will even consider R2P. In the first meeting, they provided a press statement, which in the diplomatic language is the lowest form of expression. But if the Secretary-General wishes, he can bring the matter of Myanmar back to the Security Council.

Regarding the first question, on the decision of many of the peace and democratic movements to join the arm movements, Mr. Ramos-Horta was not able to comment. “If I were in Myanmar, failed by the regional and international community, I would have no choice but to join the ethnic nationalities armies. What the military is provoking now, is that eventually millions of people will join ethnic nationalities and start taking up arms, they can obtain from India, Thailand and that is the problem. The military is the ones creating conditions for widespread armed insurgency in Myanmar. The military was never able to secure a territory of Myanmar controlled by ethnic groups. They negotiate ceased fire agreements, but the insurgents did not surrender their weapons and in the perspective, it was a wise decision.”



**Aigul Kulnazarova, Professor, Tama University:**

Ms. Kulnazarova shifted the attention from the international community to regional organizations. Referring to the UN and its power of denying credentials, she asked if ASEAN can do the same? She also asked Mr. Ramos-Horta to reflect more on regional measures and what can be done here, in the home region.

**Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta's Response:**

Mr. Ramos-Horta responded that concerning ASEAN, the reason why there is not yet an envoy is that they have to discuss with Myanmar, with Tatmadaw, who they accept. ASEAN is becoming very frustrated; Myanmar is doing it literally to challenge ASEAN leaders. They are not even able to appoint a special envoy. For these reasons, there is no other way than continue with international pressure. He also noted that there were situations in different countries that were solved not in the military field, they were won in the diplomatic field.

Concerning the influence exercised by China on ASEAN members particularly Cambodia, Mr. Ramos-Horta stated that in the Security Council, China will always support Myanmar, as in any situation where China's interests do not coincide with the interest of other countries. Also, China will vote "no" for every situation that is of no interest to them. Obviously, Russia and China are opposed to the notion R2P intervention. Their view has been exacerbated by the Libya problem, Russia and China allowed the resolution for humanitarian intervention and civilian protection in Benghazi. The intervention in Benghazi expanded to regime change. For this reason in the case of Syria, Russia and China vetoed, again and again, any meaningful resolutions on Syria, because of precedence set by the US and Europeans on Benghazi in Libya. It is out of the equation that China will allow any Security Council resolution. Mr. Ramos-Horta also thinks that Antonio Gutierrez in his second term will be even freer in his mind to do what he can on Myanmar, to raise attention, to put pressure on the Security Council, to lobby with Russia and China. And the more pressure the international community puts on sanctions and more harm the military feel in their interest, the more incentive for them to find a solution.



**Sukehiro Hasegawa, President, Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan:**

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Sukehiro Hasegawa, President of GPAJ, noted three issues that emerged during the conversation with former President José Ramos-Horta on Myanmar and the spread of new corona virus. First the international community had little prior knowledge of the coup d'état and was not able to respond to it with unanimity. The Security Council was divided about its assessment of the situation. Secondly, ASEAN emerged as the regional organization with its centrality to deal with Myanmar and achieved in adopting a five point consensus on the need for (1) immediate cessation of

violence in Myanmar, (2) constructive dialogue among all parties concerned to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people, (3) appointment of a special envoy of the ASEAN to facilitate mediation, (4) humanitarian assistance through the ASEAN Humanitarian Affairs Centre, and (5) the visit of the special envoy and delegation to Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned. A few participants noted slow progress taking place in the implementation of proposed steps identified by the consensus. Thirdly, Mr. Hasegawa noted, China had emerged as the most influential neighboring country and would play a critical role in determining the fate of Myanmar. The conversation finally reflected the understanding of many participants that the Myanmar and COVID-19 crises demonstrated that more effective international cooperation was required for their resolution. In conclusion, Mr. Hasegawa thanked former President José Ramos-Horta and all other speakers for their contributions to the enriching exchange of views on the contemporary issued.