



PRESS RELEASE

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Minister of Justice Signs Decree Opening the Way for Land Reform in Timor-Leste

Nationwide land data collection to start

The Minister of Justice yesterday signed the Decree on the Cadastre, opening the way for a systematic collection of data on land and land ownership across the country. This is a critical legislation in Timor-Leste, where there is as yet no comprehensive database on land ownership that could help resolve land disputes.

The Ministerial Decree authorizes the National Directorate for Land, Property and Cadastral Services (DNTPSC) and the USAID-funded “Ita Nia Rai” program to undertake a nationwide, systematic data collection.

“Collecting data in the field is an important step towards creating a law that will regulate land ownership,” explained Ibere Lopes, a legal specialist working for the USAID-funded “Ita Nia Rai” program, which is supporting the Ministry of Justice in this key area. “Only once we know the reality of people’s relationships to land can we really draft a legislation that responds to the needs of the Timorese people”.

The Decree establishes the rules and procedures for a systematic collection of claims, and will ensure the validity of the data collection process. It also establishes that the database will be open to the public, guaranteeing transparency and free access to the information collected.

“Transparency is the key to creating a sustainable, peaceful way of managing land ownership in Timor-Leste” said Mr. Lopes. He added: “This decree establishes that the future for Timorese land administration will be an open, just and systematic process, unlike the sporadic, closed processes of colonial times.”

Information gathered from the survey will officially compose the National Property Cadastre, a comprehensive database or register of all the claims to land ownership in the country. More importantly, the survey will record competing claims to ownership, which can either be resolved locally through mediation, or through a formal justice process once the Land Law has been approved.

“Strengthening Property Rights in Timor-Leste” (known locally as “Ita Nia Rai” or “Our Land”) is a five-year USAID-funded project that aims to help the Government of Timor-Leste secure land tenure and property rights in the country. Working with the National Directorate for Land, Property and Cadastral Services and the Ministry of Justice, the program provides technical and policy support to develop a sustainable and transparent property rights system in Timor-Leste.

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