



PRESS RELEASE

Development of the PNTL after 25 years

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On March 27, 2025, the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) will celebrate its 25th anniversary. On this occasion, HABADA presents its observations on the progress, challenges, and future perspectives of the institution responsible for ensuring public security and upholding the rule of law. Over the course of a quarter of a century, the PNTL has undergone significant transformation, evolving from a newly established national police force to becoming a key pillar of the nation's security framework.

Institutional Development and Achievements

Since its establishment in 2000, the PNTL has steadily developed its institutional capacity. Key milestones include:

1. **Structural Evolution:** The PNTL adopted a philosophy of and strategies for community policing; established specialized units such as the Special Police Unit (UEP), Border Patrol Unit (UPF), Maritime Police Unit (UPM), Criminal Investigation Service (SIC); and Municipal Commands, including Village Police Officers. These measures have enhanced its ability to respond to ongoing security challenges in communities.
2. **Training and Professionalization:** Ongoing capacity-building programs, both domestic and international, have strengthened the abilities of PNTL officers, improving operational efficiency and aligning with international policing standards.
3. **Community Policing Initiatives:** Through partnerships with civil society organizations and international agencies, the PNTL has made significant progress in community policing, fostering trust and collaboration between law enforcement and local communities.
4. **International Cooperation:** Engagement with ASEAN and bilateral partners has enhanced PNTL's capacity in areas such as border security, counter-narcotics, and human trafficking prevention.
5. **Technological Integration:** Adoption of digital policing tools, such as a centralized criminal database and surveillance systems, has increased efficiency in crime prevention and investigations.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Despite notable progress, challenges persist in the development of the PNTL:

1. **Human Resource Limitations:** Insufficient personnel and limited recruitment have impacted operational efficiency, particularly in rural areas and border regions.
2. **Logistical and Infrastructure Gaps:** The lack of adequate facilities, vehicles, and modern equipment hinders the PNTL's ability to respond effectively and deliver quality police services.
3. **Accountability and Oversight:** Reports on the misuse of force highlight the need to strengthen both internal and external oversight mechanisms to build public trust.
4. **Gender Representation:** While progress has been made, female participation in PNTL leadership remains limited and requires further improvement.
5. **Cybersecurity and Emerging Threats:** The PNTL must adapt to new security threats, including cybercrime and transnational organized crime, requiring specialized skills and international collaboration.

Recommendations and Directions for the Future

To ensure sustainable progress and an effective police force, HABADA recommends the following measures:

1. **Strengthen Training and Ethical Standards:** Implement continuous training programs focused on human rights, conflict resolution, and police ethics to enhance professionalism within the PNTL.
2. **Invest in Infrastructure and Resources:** The government should prioritize budget allocations for modern police stations, forensic laboratories, and updated communication systems.
3. **Gender and Diversity Initiatives:** Encourage greater participation of women and marginalized groups in leadership roles within the PNTL to foster an inclusive and representative law enforcement agency.
4. **Community Engagement to Build Trust:** Expand community policing programs and build partnerships with local leaders to enhance the PNTL's credibility and effectiveness in crime prevention.

Conclusion

The 25 years of the PNTL reflect both significant achievements and ongoing challenges. Timor-Leste continues to strengthen its national security institutions, investing in capacity, accountability, and modernization of the PNTL, which remains crucial for the nation's stability and long-term development. HABADA reaffirms its commitment to supporting PNTL initiatives that enhance effectiveness, transparency, and a community-oriented approach, ensuring a safer and more secure Timor-Leste.

For further information, please contact:

Abel Amaral
Executive Director
Mobile: +670 7745 4324
Email: abelamaral75@gmail.com
Website: www.habada.org