

February 04, 2014



EDUCATION - Jesuits opened an education project in East Timor last week in the presence of Jesuit Superior General Father Adolfo Nicolás and several government ministers and officials.

The guests included Minister of Education Bendito Dos Santos Freitas; Minister of Social Solidarity Isabel Guterres; Bishop, Alberto Ricardo da Silva of Dili, Vicar General, Father Lucio Norberto de Deus, representing the Bishop Norberto do Amaral of Maliana, in whose diocese the project is located.

Several ambassadors including the Portuguese Ambassador, local provincials of several religious congregations, all the major superiors in the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific, and Father Mark Raper SJ, JCAP President and Superior of the Jesuit Independent Region of East Timor also attended the function. The students and their families were among the some 500 people gathered for the event.

Located in Kasait, a rural area about an hour's drive from Dili, the project comprises of a secondary school, which took in its first intake of seven students in January 2013, and a teacher training institute, which is set to open in January 2016. The project is expected to be completed in another 10 years.

In his speech, Father Nicolás stressed that the Jesuits are not building the project to continue a Jesuit tradition. “We open it to be part of the growth of a country like East Timor. That is why I am very happy that the Minister of Education is here because we want to collaborate with all the forces of the country to prepare a better future for East Timor.”

Jesuits first came to Timor Leste over a century ago and even in those early days there was a Jesuit education programme. More recently, the Jesuits ran a secondary school, for the Diocese of Dili until December 2011, and a secondary school in the parish of Railaco up in the hills.

Minister Freitas welcomed the project saying it will serve a need in the country.

“The long years of foreign occupation had a profound impact on society and this influenced the first years of post-independence governments. After Independence was restored in 2002, successive governments were confronted by the need to reconstruct totally an education system which would not just contribute to economic development, but would be relevant to and help to build the national identity,” said Minister Freitas.

“Over these past 10 years we have lacked infrastructure, equipment, qualified teachers and curricula, and on top of that the challenge of devising a system of education based on the two official languages, Portuguese and Tetum.”

For many Timorese Jesuits, several of whom received a Jesuit education, the project is the culmination of a dream for their country and their people. It is a dream that is being made possible through the support and generosity of Jesuits and benefactors around the world who have put their trust in the children of Timor Leste and want the best for them.

The Minister commended the Jesuits on initiating the education project saying that “A distinctive mark of Jesuit education is its capacity to form citizens who are aware and responsible regarding society and their role in it: citizens who become models of ethical conduct, who reinforce the social structures and who give vitality to Christian and human values.”

Source: ucanews.com, January 30, 2014