

## **East Timor – 2002 – Presidential Election**

We're talking about the 2002 presidential election in East Timor. This was at a point in time when East Timor was under the direct administration of the United Nations, the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor. And I was actually the first member of the electoral team to arrive in the country in late 2000 and kind of the last one to leave in 2002 after the UN came down and the Timorese flag went. We had successfully held the Constituent Assembly elections in 2001. Lots of turnout, very smooth process. You know, lots of good UN election professionals from all over the world were part of the team. And we had no problems with ballot printing.

Come the 2002 presidential election, of course, it was widely expected that Xanana Gusmao, the hero of East Timor's liberation struggle, would run for president and win. There was another elder Timorese who decided to run to at least, you know, you have an election rather than just a single candidate running. Xavier do Amaral had been an important figure in Timorese politics. I think felt it was his duty to at least, you know, throw his hat in the ring and have at least two candidates on the ballot to really consider it an election. And he had the support of two of the political parties. Xanana pretty much had the support of all of the rest.

We on the elections team, under the Aegis of the Independent Electoral Commission and for the 2002 election the Commission itself, the Board of Commissioners, was two internationals, Oracio Bonao and Michael Bailey, and three members. We had begun briefing candidates in January of 2002. We explained that while the ballot design hadn't been confirmed, it was most likely that in the case of party candidates, party logos and candidate photos would be on the ballot and we continued to brief that in our meetings, with parties and candidates, you know through February into March, the election was scheduled for April. We ended up scheduling the random drawing for the order of party logos to appear on the presidential ballot. Parties showed up for that. The Chief electoral officer drew the party names of, I think it was, a Spinner. And we had the order of parties set on the ballot. And we started, you know, the process of printing the ballots. That was being done by the government Printer Printing Office in Australia's NT in Darwin. Which was also UN's logistics base for the Timor mission.

We started hearing noises that Xanana was not happy with the party logos appearing on the ballot, and eventually he came out and said that he would pull out of the election if the party logos remained on the ballot. The Board of Commissioners, you know, had a decision to make and basically you know, they were of the mind that since we had been briefing everyone since January, this was a bit late in the process. To tell us that he didn't want party logos on the ballot, the order of the logos had already been drawn

so that what the Commissioners came to was a decision. All of the political parties, within a period of I don't know, three or four days that they set for this. Officially asked the Election Commission not to put the party logos on the ballot, they would issue instructions not to put party logos on the ballot.

Well, most of the parties very quickly submitted that request in writing to the Commission. There were one or two that there were discussions coming and going. When we got to the deadline, there was one party that had not submitted a request to remove its logo from the ballot, so the Commission basically said OK, we go ahead. And today, you know, you've been busy with everything. For a while things are in hand. You can go to Darwin, take a few days off. Before things got really busy, so I was in Darwin. Going to the beach, enjoying myself, doing some shopping, etcetera. I got a frantic call from Dilly saying that the SRSG and the head of political affairs and the senior political officer had all been talking to Xanana and he was very serious that he was considering pulling out of the race. Of course, this would have thrown the whole process into absolute chaos. So I eventually received an instruction from the Commissioners and Chief Electoral Officer to go to the Government printing office in Darwin and ask them to stop the printing. So I got in my rental car. I found the Government printing office and was pounding on the door. I forget what day of the week it was. But you know, printing presses can be loud and I don't think it was a regular work day, but anyway the process was going on it was loud. Somebody eventually came to the door and let me in. I explained the situation and I said well, great, but we've already finished the printing. We're now in the process of trimming the ballots and getting ready to put them in pads and put covers on them and staple them and number them, number them and all. All that I said, well, you know, sorry, but we're gonna have to start all over again.

So in the case of the Timorese presidential elections in 2002. There's, there's essentially a ballot that never was it. It got printed, but it was never used. And the ballots were redone only with the names and photos of the candidates. And that was the ballot that was used.