

## Message from the Secretary-General

I am very pleased to send my greetings to all the participants of the UNITAR IPS-JIIA conference on UNTAET, as well as my thanks to the organizers and sponsors for providing this important opportunity for assessing an historic United Nations operation. As you meet in Tokyo, the current session of the General Assembly is preparing to receive East Timor as a new Member State of the United Nations. This makes it a particularly timely moment to reflect on the unprecedented efforts undertaken by the international community to help the people of East Timor prepare for independent statehood.

In October 1999 the Security Council passed Resolution 1272 mandating UNTAET to guide East Timor's transition to independence, after a period of violence and instability. Over the following two and a half years, the transitional administration managed to restore stability and establish the basic administrative and political structures for an independent East Timor. The Transitional Administrator and UNTAET staff deserve great credit for the mission's accomplishments, and it is on these foundations that the people and leaders of East Timor are now continuing the work of building their country.

The nature and scope of the challenge meant that the United Nations, and all others involved, often had to learn by doing, refining and developing methods whilst implementing the mandate. The tasks of the transitional period required the collaboration of many actors, supported by resources from a range of donors. The unified and steadfast guidance of the Security Council, the political and financial support of numerous Member States, the early actions of INTERFET, the contributions of the family of UN agencies, international financial institutions, and NGOs – all played vital roles in the

process. Clearly, the most important of all the UN's partners were the East Timorese people, whose support, advice, guidance and, indeed, constructive criticism, were essential.

One of the defining characteristics of resolution 1272 is that it mandated UNTAET with inherently open-ended tasks relating to building the very fabric of a nation, tasks which could not be achieved in a transition of a few years, but, rather, are the ongoing tasks of development. Among some of the particularly challenging elements of resolution 1272 were the establishment of justice and the rule of law, the need to balance the priorities of delivering government services speedily, and building capacity from a human resource base with limited professional training and experience. I have no doubt that you will find that UNTAET, as with any such complex organisation, was stronger in some areas than others.

UNTAET's mandate is unlikely to be often repeated, yet there are many lessons to be drawn from specific elements of the mandate, such as: support for institution-building; support for the rule of law and constitution-making; planning for complex operations; robust peacekeeping and the linkage between multi-national and UN peacekeeping operations, to name just a few.

Let us also remember that the international community's work continues in East Timor through the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET), which is assisting East Timor in consolidating and building upon the gains made thus far. I am confident that East Timor will build upon UNTAET's legacy and the international community's continuing assistance to ensure that the country's new institutions safeguard the democratic independence for which the East Timorese sacrificed so much. Ultimately, the courage and determination of the East Timorese people, and their commitment to build their nation in a spirit of justice, reconciliation and democracy, will be the key to ensuring that the foundations of nationhood laid during the transitional period are preserved.

*Kofi Annan*  
*Secretary-General of the United Nations*

*September 2002*