



Timorese Democratic (UDT)

Source: Clinton Fernandes, Associate Professor, International and Political Studies Program, UNSW Australia | February 2015

The Timorese Democratic Union or UDT (União Democrática Timorese) was formed on 11 May 1974. It was the first political organization in the province of Portuguese Timor to be launched after the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974. Since provincial laws had not been automatically repealed, the bans on political parties remained in force there despite having been repealed in Portugal itself. For this reason, the UDT and other political organizations did not use the word 'party', choosing instead the words 'union', 'association' or 'front'. The UDT had 23 members, including three members of the regime-sanctioned Acção Nacional Popular (ANP). UDT leaders tended to have close ties to the colonial system due to their relatively senior positions in the civil service or their proximity to the Catholic Church. UDT's first president was Francisco Lopes da Cruz, its vice-president was Cesar Augusto da Costa Mouzinho and its secretary-general was Domingos Oliveira. Its other leaders were the Carrascalao brothers (Manuel, Mario and Joao).

Since many UDT leaders came from conservative, land-owning families, they were threatened by a FRETILIN initiative called 'alfabetizacao' or basic literacy. They were also worried by FRETILIN's tactic of communicating directly with the villagers rather than relying on traditional chiefs or civil servants, as they themselves did. On 21 January 1975, UDT formed a coalition with FRETILIN. Both parties agreed that East Timor should become independent and that they would form a transitional government. This government would have representatives from the Portuguese government and from UDT and FRETILIN. It would prepare a Constitution that would form the basis of an independent East Timor.

Indonesian intelligence operatives manipulated the political inexperience of the leaders of both parties, stoking the flames of mutual distrust. After village-level elections in Los Palos in May 1975 delivered a clear victory to village chiefs who were FRETILIN supporters, UDT formally withdrew from the coalition. Indonesian intelligence advised UDT leaders that

FRETILIN was planning a coup on 15 August 1975. Indonesia, they said, would respect East Timor's right of self-determination if UDT moved against FRETILIN. Accordingly, key UDT members led a preemptive coup against FRETILIN in the early hours of 11 August 1975. FRETILIN fought back on 20 August, defeating most of the UDT forces by 30 August. Between 1,500 and 3,000 people are estimated to have been killed during the internal armed conflict. The Portuguese governor and his administration left the mainland for the off-shore island of Atauro, and later proceeded to Portugal. The defeated forces of UDT, now located in West Timor, signed a petition calling for the integration of East Timor into Indonesia.

After the Indonesian invasion, Mario Carrascalao became the Governor of East Timor in 1982. Joao Carrascalao would later participate in the National Council of Timorese Resistance, a forum in which exiled figures from FRETILIN and UDT campaigned for independence whilst also sniping at one another. Manuel Carrascalao's son, Manuelito, would be killed in 1999 by militia thugs acting at the behest of Indonesian soldiers and police. The UDT essentially disappeared from the parliamentary process after independence.

Further reading:

Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste. *Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste*. Dili, 2005.

Federer, Juan. *The UN in East Timor: building Timor Leste, a fragile state*. Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2005.

Fernandes, Clinton. *The Independence of East Timor: Multidimensional Perspectives*. Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2011.

Taylor, John. *East Timor: the price of freedom*. New York: Zed Books, 1999.