



News Release

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EAST TIMOR FIRST LADY IS BLUE MOUNTAINS GUEST

Kirsty Sword Gusmão, East Timor's Ambassador for Education visited Katoomba on September 12th as a guest of the Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters (BMETS).

Australian-born Kirsty, wife of the Timor Leste Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao, spoke of developments in East Timor to a packed auditorium.

She emphasised that while the building of bridges and buildings was important work, the need to build people's skills to teach, to manage and to work in many occupations was essential if the infrastructure was to be effectively used.

BMETS spokesperson Suzie van Opdorp said, "There was no doubt this was a very special occasion. Kirsty Sword Gusmão is very unassuming but truly inspirational. It was obvious that she built a strong connection with the audience as she fielded a wide range of questions through which everyone became much the wiser."

On behalf of the City of Blue Mountains, students from Katoomba Public School presented Kirsty with a beautiful hand-felted wall hanging they had created with Mudgee-based artist, Helen Doble. The children excitedly explained to Kirsty, the various native flora and fauna depicted on the wall hanging.

Principal of Katoomba Public School, Jeannette McCarthy, acknowledged the work of the children and the pleasure it gave the school to participate in creating the gift for East Timor.

Former Deputy Mayor, Cllr Chris Van der Kley and former councillor Kerrin O'Grady, spoke on behalf of the Blue Mountains City Council Friendship Group with a particular mention of the significant visit last year with the former Mayor, Jim Angel, to sign a formal Friendship Agreement with the district administration of Hatu bulico.

The visit also provided the opportunity for BMETS to discuss the most effective ways to assist East Timor with Kirsty, who has been at the forefront of developments there since 1999. In addition to the community development projects supported by BMETS, Kirsty acknowledged the value of personal friendships that have been developing between people in the Blue Mountains and in East Timor.

Kirsty established the Alola Foundation in 2002, which supports the development of education, maternal and child health, economic empowerment and humanitarian systems.

Last year President Dr Jose Ramos Horta appointed Kirsty the Goodwill Ambassador for Education in recognition of her efforts within the country and internationally to progress education in the fledging nation.

The Friendship Schools Project links primary and secondary schools in Australia with schools in East Timor and two Blue Mountains schools are working on joining this program.

“Kirsty Sword Gusmão left no doubt that her new country has some wise leaders and sound policies in place, it is a country on the move - even if the road ahead might have some big hurdles to jump”, said Suzie van Opdorp.

Photo: Kirsty Sword Gusmao (front) receiving her gift from students (L to R) Jaia, Lochlan, Hal and Thomas, Principal Jeannette McCarthy, and Teacher Sophia Watson, of Katoomba Public School, on behalf of the City of Blue Mountains.

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