



Dr. Kirsty Sword Gusmão (AO)

BIOGRAPHY

1966-

Kirsty Sword Gusmão was educated at the University of Melbourne and Monash University and she holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and a Diploma of Education. It was at Melbourne University that she first met students from Timor-Leste and began translating reports from the clandestine movement, making public the tales of appalling human rights abuses they told. It was during this time that she became an advocate for an independent Timor-Leste, which she remains to this day.

In 2001 she founded the [ALOLA Foundation](#), a not for profit organisation which strives to improve the lives of women and girls. The Foundation's motto is "*Strong Women, Strong Nation*" and it has a strong record of enabling girls to complete their secondary schooling as well as contributing to a dramatic reduction in rates of infant mortality through promotion of exclusive breastfeeding, family planning and immunisation.

Kirsty Sword Gusmão continues to Chair the Alola Foundation which has been lauded for its work in the areas of education, advocacy, economic empowerment and maternal and child health.

In 2007 then President José Ramos-Horta, appointed Kirsty Sword Gusmão as Goodwill Ambassador for Education of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. In this role, she has worked tirelessly to rally support for improved educational infrastructure, including the rebuilding of over a dozen remote rural schools. Appointed as the first Chair of the Timor-Leste National Commission for UNESCO, Dr Sword Gusmão has advocated strongly for a greater role for the country's 17 local languages in the early grades of primary education.

In December 2012, Kirsty was diagnosed with breast cancer and, following her successful treatment in Melbourne, she returned to Timor-Leste to establish a women's cancer support group called HALIKU. The group conducts targeted grass-roots education campaigns on the importance of early detection of women's cancers across the country and is now

integrated into the Maternal and Child Health program of the Alola Foundation.

In 2014 she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Victoria University in recognition of her outstanding service to the community through her dedication to promoting the importance of education in improving the lives of women and children and in championing the introduction of educational initiatives in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, and her tireless efforts to generate support for women's rights.

In 2015 Kirsty Sword Gusmão was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for her distinguished service to Australia-East Timor relations through the development of mutual co-operation and understanding, particularly in the education sector, and as an advocate for improved health and living conditions for the Timorese people.

She was also awarded the Order of Timor – Leste in May 2016 for her significant contribution to Timor Leste's independence struggle and the well-being of its people.

Kirsty Sword Gusmão now lives in Melbourne with her three teenage sons. She worked as the Coordinator of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's Community Engagement and Development Program from 2017 to 2020 and is presently serving as Senior Partnerships and Coordination Advisor to the Timor-Leste Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.