

AGUIDA AMARAL



An extraordinary East Timorese woman named Aguida Fatima Amaral (Green jacket), operates a small sporting club: 'Club Sport Laulara & Benfica Timor-Leste' on the outskirts of the East Timorese capital, Dili. Aguida is a marathon runner and competed in the Sydney and Athens Olympics. She met the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 and then again in Dili, where he asked her if she ever needed assistance with anything to ask.

At Aguida's sporting club, the children walk up to two hours to the sports field before each training session. With little energy left, they then commence a formal training program. The young athletes do not have proper training shoes. They don't have

simple athletics equipment like stop watches or starting blocks and are using sticks and stones as javelins and shot puts. So to make the activities of the sports club more effective and to maximize the full potential of the Timor's future athletes, Aguida decided to accept the Australian Prime Minister's offer of assistance and ask for help with athletics equipment.

Aguida loves athletics. As a senior athlete and as a mother of five children, Aguida has chosen to take on the responsibility of developing and encouraging young people to be involved in athletics and shares with them her experiences as an Olympic athlete.

In March this year Aguida wrote a proposal to John Howard. East Timor's First Lady, and founder of the Alola Foundation, Kirsty Sword Gusmão, supported Aguida's proposal:

'Aguida Amaral is a very special woman. With very little support, sponsorship or training equipment, and in a country ravaged by war at the time, she had a goal and she achieved it. Who could forget her entry I into the stadium at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, the amazing reception she received from the crowd, or the dramatic finish to her marathon race? She is strong, determined, courageous and disciplined and I know, from personal experience, she is a woman who achieves what she sets out to do. What better role model could the children of our nation have?'

The Hon Julie Bishop, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues recently gave the great news that AU\$50,000 funding had been approved, and would be administered through UNIFEM Australia. UNIFEM has a Women's Leadership Program in East Timor. She sees that this funding in helping equip the club will also provide a wonderful opportunity to raise the profile of Ms Amaral in her developing role as a female leader in her community, and raise her profile for broader leadership roles in other spheres of East Timor.

'Club Sport Laulara & Benfica Timor-Leste' aims to:

1. recruit young people who are interested in athletics,
2. train young people so they reach their full athletic potential,
3. compete in sports competitions conducted by the Timor-Leste Athletic Federation and Association of Amateur Athletes, and
4. raise the profile of athletics in Timor-Leste.

The Committee's role includes helping Aguida manage the funds granted by the Australian Government, enlisting support from the wider Australian community through the connections of the committee, seeking donations of suitable equipment, seeking volunteer athletics trainers and assisting with correspondence in English

Aguida F Amaral – Club Sport Benfica E Laulara
Antonio F Amaral – Trainer, Sports Laulara Benfica
Germano A J Da Silva – Office of the President
Kirsty Sword Gusmão – Chairwoman, Alola Foundation
Jane Crouch – Personal Assistant for Kirsty Sword Gusmão, Alola Foundation
Alita Verdial – Advocacy Program Manager, Alola Foundation
Domingos Belo – representing ANZ Bank Dili, and the Manager Chris Durman
Steve Lancaster- Australian Federal Police
Craig Sheehan – Australian Federal Police



Car donated by UNIFEM Australia