

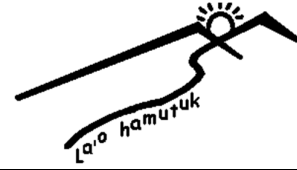
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Translated from Tetum original

Dili, 04 June 2021

To: His Excellency, President of the National Parliament, Dr. Aniceto Longuinhos Guterres Lopes

Cc: Deputies in the National Parliament, Prime Minister, President of the Republic, Media and public

Regarding: Suspend the discussion of the proposed Cybercrime Law for now

With respect,

For some time, La'ó Hamutuk has been watching freedom of expression and information in Timor-Leste based on the RDTL Constitution, Article 6 of which defines the objectives of the state, Article 40 speaks about freedom of expression and information, and Article 41 is about freedom of the press and other means of social communication. We suggest to value these rights during the current emergency period, and not to make a new law which could hamper Timorese people's ability to have discussions. Parliament and Government in this beloved country should concentrate on urgent issues, and not use today's crisis to limit citizens' rights.

We note that in the last few years, government has tried several ways to limit and criminalize the right to access information and expression which belongs to every citizen in this democratic country. In June of last year, the Ministry of Justice tried to advance an amendment to the Penal Code to criminalize defamation at the same time Timor-Leste was under a State of Emergency because the world was confronting the Covid-19 pandemic. Less than a year later, Government submitted a proposed Cybercrime Law to regulate freedom of expression and the press in the virtual world.

The public disagreed with the draft defamation law, as shown in demonstrations, television debates and social media voicing support and opposition. Several civil society organizations wrote submissions to the Ministry of Justice, National Parliament, President of the Republic and President of the Council of Ministers to cancel the proposal. In the end, Government did not submit this proposed law to the Council of Ministers.

But why is the Government continuing to repeat the same behavior during this emergency, which requires everyone to stay in their homes, because the number of people infected with Covid-19 increases every day? To rush the discussion of the proposed Cybercrime Law will kill people's freedom of expression and media in the virtual world.

We hope that our thoughts will be considered by your Excellency the President of the National Parliament, and that you will not put the proposed Cybercrime Law on the current Parliamentary agenda. Please wait until the situation returns to normal, without a state of emergency and travel restrictions, so that Parliament can conduct meaningful consultation and hear considered thoughts from everyone before bringing it to the plenary for discussion.

This concludes our letter to your Excellency the President of the National Parliament, and we hope Your Excellency will consider our thoughts and not present the proposed Cybercrime Law to the plenary. Thank you.

With respect,

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