

Global media groups urge Timor-Leste PM to drop defamation case

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The International Federation of Journalists and the South East Asia Journalist Unions have joined international organisations Committee to Protect Journalists and Freedom House in calling on the Timor-Leste Prime Minister to withdraw a criminal defamation case against a local journalist and media outlet.

The IFJ, SEAJU, CPJ and Freedom House sent a [letter](#) to Timor-Leste Prime Minister Dr Rui Maria de Araújo relating to the criminal defamation case brought before *Timor Post* journalist Oki Raimundos, former editor Lourenco Vicente Martins and the *Timor Post*.

The case against Oki and the *Timor Post* is based on a published report from 10 November 2015, which contained a factual error on a government tendering process. In accordance with Timor-Leste's own Press Law, the outlet subsequently published a correction and right of reply from the Prime Minister's office in relation to the story.

"In spite of this, you have filed a criminal defamation lawsuit that carries potential prison sentences against Oki, Vincente and *Timor Post*," the letter said.

Oki and Martins were summoned to attend the office of the Prosecutor-General on Monday, April 11. Appearing with their lawyers, each faced separate 30 minute interviews.

Both men relied on their right to silence, and each was given a "letter" stating that neither could change his address nor travel overseas without giving the prosecutor 15 days' notice. The prosecutor will now decide whether to file an indictment or drop the charges.

The time permitted for the prosecutor to gather evidence and to make a decision about remains unclear.

IFJ lawyer in Dili

Australian barrister and IFJ legal representative Jim Nolan was in Timor Leste on April 11 to support Oki and Martins.

During his trip he met with various figures in the Timor-Leste media.

In a piece [authored](#) by Nolan, he said that the prosecution must establish four conditions. Firstly, the publication of the 'accusation'. Secondly, at the time of publication; the journalist must be "aware of the falsity of the accusation," thirdly, the accusation must concern the "commission of a crime"; and fourthly, the publication must be made "with the intent of having criminal proceedings initiated against the person."

In the letter, IFJ, SEAJU, CPJ and Freedom House highlighted the implications for the case for Timor Leste's press freedom, noting that such actions will weaken the view of the country's media freedom in the eyes of the international community.

The IFJ said: "We continue to support our local affiliates as well as Oki and Martins as they continue with this battle.

"The support of the international community highlights the importance of this case and the need to end criminal defamation as a tool to silence critics. We again, call on the Prime Minister to withdraw the case against Oki and Martins."