



International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

The Global Voice of Journalists

Timor Leste prosecution proceeds with investigation into defamation case

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The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) with its affiliates the Timor Leste Press Union (TLPU) and the Timor Leste Journalist Association (TLJA) condemned the actions of the Government of Timor-Leste which has commenced an investigation into a defamation lawsuit against local media. The IFJ, TLPU and TLJA demand the government immediately withdraw the charges and revert the case to the Press Council.



Oki Raimundo. Credit: TLJA

On Monday, April 11, Oki Raimundos, and the former editor of the *Timor Post* Lourenco Martins Vicente were interviewed by a prosecutor from the office of the Timor Leste Prosecutor- General in relation to a defamation lawsuit filed by Timor Leste Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo. The interview was the first step in the process of a decision whether to lay charges against the journalists under the Timorese criminal code.

The [defamation lawsuit](#) relates to a story published in November 2015 in the *Timor Post*, which said that Prime Minister Araujo, in his previous capacity as advisor to the Minister for Finance recommended the winning bid for a project to supply and install computer equipment to the new Ministry of Finance building in 2014. As outlined under the country's new Press Law, Article 34, the right of reply is guaranteed. As such, The *Timor Post* published the Prime Minister's reply to the article in the paper's front page on 17 November 2015. The *Timor Post* then published a clarification of Oki's report in its 18 November 2015 issue.

Article 8 of the Timor Leste Press Law clearly is intended to protect journalists. It states "The right of journalists to report shall be exercised on the basis of constitutional powers, may not be subjected to interference that threatens their independence and objectivity, freedom of establishment, and freedom of conscience."

Although the due process was followed by the *Timor Post*, the government has commenced the legal process which may lead to charges under the criminal code. After Monday's 'interview' - where the man relied upon their right to silence - they were officially instructed that they may not change address or travel overseas without first giving the Prosecutor General 15 days' notice.

The TLPU president Jose Belo said: "The TPLU is deeply saddened by the Timor Leste Prime Minister's actions to take Oki and the *Timor Post* to court. This legal action by the Prime Minister sets a very bad precedent for Timor Leste democracy and press freedom. This case is going to be the terrible lesson for our country and will endanger freedom of expression, TLPU strongly condemn the Prime Minister's behavior."

The TLJA president Hugo David said: "People in this country have the right to access to information, and the media and journalists are merely a means of information intermediaries,

therefore we ask the prime minister to make a reflection on the legal actions that could injure the rights of the people and democracy, We also asked the court to use the press law in solving the case.”

The IFJ said: “The lawsuit brought against Oki and Vicente is an attack on press freedom and the right to information in Timor Leste. The government of Timor Leste is trying to silence critics, through the use of laws that contradict the newly established Press Council. As a matter of principle, criminal prosecutions of journalists cannot be tolerated.”

The IFJ along with its affiliates continue to monitor the situation and support Oki and Vicente. The *Timor Post* is also supporting the two journalists in resisting the prosecutor’s investigation. Jim Nolan, Australian Barrister and IFJ legal representative is currently in Dili, Timor Leste as a legal observer. He attended the Prosecutor-General’

For further information contact IFJ Asia-Pacific on +61 2 9333 0946

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ABOUT IFJ

The International Federation of Journalists is the world's largest organisation of journalists. First established in 1926, it was relaunched in 1946 and again, in its present form, in 1952. Today the Federation represents around 600.000 members in 139 countries across the world. The IFJ promotes international action to defend press freedom and social justice through strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists.