

# TIMOR-LESTE: Judge acquits two journalists facing jail for defamation



Timor Post editor Lourenco Martins (from left), reporter Oki Raimudos, and a lawyer earlier in the judicial process. Image: Jim Nolan/IFJ

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*By Bob Howarth in a special report for Pacific Media Watch*

DILI (*Pacific Media Watch*): A Dili District Court judge has acquitted two Timor-Leste journalists on a charge of criminal defamation on the grounds of lack of evidence.

The journalists, *Timor Post* reporter Raimudos Oki, and his former editor Lourenco Vicente Martins faced, possible jail sentences under Timor-Leste's defamation law, Article 285 of the penal code which comes under criminal law.

The court was packed yesterday with local journalists supporting Oki and Martins.

The charge resulted from a report that Oki wrote last November about the awarding of contracts by the former deputy finance minister now current Prime Minister Dr Rui Maria de Araújo.

Oki admitted he had made a mistake in naming a wrong company in his report and the *Timor Post* published an apology and retraction the next day.

However, under the country's legal process the Prime Minister could not withdraw the charge once the prosecutor brought it to court.

Two days before the final decision of the court, Dr Araújo wrote to the court defending the two journalists, saying they should not be jailed and he did not seek damages.

The prosecution submitted to the court the two defendants "knew the news was fake" and that with the publication "the injured [the Prime Minister] would be subject to a process of criminal investigation for suspected crimes in public office."

Both local and foreign journalist activists had protested about the possibility of Oki and his editor facing jail terms.

The various groups have said they will continue to lobby the government to change the defamation law to the civil code and delete the clause involving jail sentences.

In Brussels, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) joined its local affiliates, Timor-Leste Press Union (TLPU) and Timor-Leste Journalists Association (TLJA), in welcoming the judicial decision and [commended the journalists for their "brave fight"](#).



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