

The IFJ and senior Australian media have launched an online campaign against the East Timor Press Law. Join the campaign here <https://www.change.org/p/stop-east-timor-press-law>

IFJ Blog: "Don't let East Timor's media be silenced"

By Mark Davis

In the 1990's East Timorese journalist, Jose Belo, began his career smuggling evidence of Indonesian military atrocities out of the country.... and smuggling undercover foreign journalists in.

Since then he has become one of the bravest, loudest and sharpest investigative journalists in the region, exposing multiple cases of corruption and political abuses in his country. But his days of whispering the truth rather than speaking it may be returning.

Jose is leading the charge against a set of extraordinarily repressive media laws which have managed to wind their way through the East Timorese parliament.

The laws propose a state licencing system for all publications and websites and a licencing system for individual journalists themselves. The journalistic licences will be granted, suspended or cancelled at the whim of a committee set up to ensure that the media work to a set of national, social and economic goals.

The details can be found in this story by [Jose Belo](#) and [here](#) and in the legislations [itself](#).

Even a quick read will give you an idea of where this legislation is heading. In short, it is a shopping list of fines, crimes, penalties and restrictions. The risks will be too high for any sane journalist or business to venture into print or online publishing. What is currently a very lively and open media environment will be flicked into darkness within a year.

Over the past few months the legislation has been bouncing through the courts after the President refused to sign off on the legislation, raising concerns about its constitutionality. That process is now exhausted and the legislation, with minor adaptations expected, is returning to Parliament for final passage in a few weeks' time.

There is a small window right now to exert some influence and lend some support to a group of East Timorese journalists who are fighting to keep East Timor free – in the fullest sense of the word.

Mark Davis is an award-winning international journalist for Dateline, SBS TV, Australia. He has a long association with East Timor dating back to 1998 and has worked closely with local journalists, including his long-time friend Jose Belo.

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On Twitter and social media use the hashtag #NotoEastTimormedialaw

<http://www.ifj.org/nc/news-single-view/backpid/33/article/ifj-blog-dont-let-the-curtains-be-drawn-on-east-timor/>