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## **MEAA condemns East Timor's attack on press freedom**

MEAA, the trade union and industry advocate for Australia's journalists, condemns the East Timor government's proposed new media law that will have a chilling effect on press freedom across the country. Elements of the law have been found to be unconstitutional.

The law would impose a journalist certification system to be determined by a proposed Press Council (which would be funded, in part, by the state). It also includes strict definitions of who can be a journalist. Foreign journalists could only operate in the country with government authorisation. Breaches of the law could trigger fines of up to \$US25,000.

MEAA federal secretary Christopher Warren said: "Australian journalists and media organisations have given strong support to Timor Leste. It is disappointing to see their efforts undermined by proposed laws that aim to muzzle the media and deny legitimate reporting of issues crucial to the development of a democratic state."

The proposed media law was approved by the National Parliament on May 6. Last week, the country's Court of Appeal found that several articles in the media law were [contrary to the Constitution](#) and ruled against Article 20 on journalist's obligations, Article 24 on foreign capital and Article 40 on the issue of media fines.

Having been challenged in the Court of Appeal the proposed law returns to the National Parliament to be revised or abandoned. While the articles in question may be revised, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) warns that there are still large sections of the law of concern to press freedom.

The IFJ and its affiliate, Timor Leste Journalist Association (AJTL) have called on the national parliament to urgently review the press laws. Timor Leste's Press Union has also strongly voiced criticism of the laws on a broader scale. The TLPU believes the law was created to restrict local and foreign journalist reporting on East Timor, particularly on corruption, nepotism and financial mismanagement.

Warren said: "At a time when many governments around the world are seeking to repress the media and when journalists are being increasingly targeted for simply doing their jobs, MEAA urges those responsible for this law to rethink the legislation. Timor Leste's lawmakers should create a legislative framework for the media industry that exemplifies best practice and promotes free expression and media rights for local and foreign journalists."

MEAA has joined the IFJ's online campaign calling for the President to withdraw these laws by using the hashtag #NotoEastTimormedialaws MEAA and senior Australian media have also launched an online campaign against the Press laws. Join the campaign here <https://www.change.org/p/stop-east-timor-press-law>

In the 2013 draft of the law, approved by the Council of Ministers of Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao's government on August 6 2013, there were several concerns for press freedom advocates. Article 1 stated that law aimed to regulate journalistic activities. Article 2 defined a journalist as someone who works for a news agency – a provision which may exclude citizen journalists/bloggers. Article 6 defined journalists as those whose "education and qualifications are recognised by the Press Council" and who are "engaged in a journalistic activity with a media organisation".

Article 7 required journalists to complete an internship of at least six months with a media organisation before being issued with a certificate of completion, essential to qualify for Press Council certification. Journalists could be ordered by a court to disclose their confidential sources. Article 17 imposed a right of reply on media organisations to be fulfilled within 15 days of broadcast or publication. Under Article 18, the law could allow criminal defamation actions.