



July 19, 2016

H.E. Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo
Prime Minister of Timor Leste
Dili, Timor Leste

Dear Prime Minister Araújo,

Thank you very much indeed for your thoughtful response to our letter dated April 22, 2016. We appreciate the time you took to provide such a detailed response to international concerns. At the same time, our organisations maintain and reiterate our original call for the prompt withdrawal of the criminal charges against journalist Oki Raimundos and Lorencos Martins of the *Timor Post* lodged by your government.

We take very seriously the matters we are discussing and understand that any person who is a target of adverse press comment or press inaccuracies will feel the criticism keenly. That said, we are also aware that senior politicians, community and business leaders, and other persons in powerful positions usually have ample means at their disposal to respond to press criticisms. As a public figure in a democracy, scrutiny by way of the media is part of the responsibility to the people you serve.

Your letter notes that the Timor-Leste press law contains a provision which allows complaints to be addressed under criminal law. That, with great respect, is not the answer to this issue. The fact that the criminal law allows for the investigation and prosecution of journalists for inaccuracy or what may be regarded as unfair reporting points is, by itself, unacceptable in any modern democratic country. It is all the more disappointing that Timor-Leste, a democracy, has such laws and highlights the need for urgent law reform.

All our organizations have campaigned globally against criminal defamation and other laws that permit the jailing of journalists for their reporting. In fact, the global standard in functioning democracies is a strong move away from such oppressive laws.

We believe that Timor Leste's democracy is robust enough to permit a free and probing press – even when some reports may be regarded as making claims or statements that are not fully substantiated with corroborating evidence.

The *Timor Post*'s publication of your refutation of the story in question and acknowledgement of a "technical error" in its reporting is consistent with international press standards for corrections to mistakes made in published reports. This editorial acknowledgement should stand as sufficient means of resolution. However, the resorting to punitive criminal action can be viewed only by our organisations as draconian and disproportionate.



At this critical time for your country and as a democratically elected leader, we believe you should strive to protect, not endanger, press freedom. One meaningful step would be to withdraw these charges and instead use your mandate to abolish the criminal codes in Timorese law that can be abused to stifle free expression and curb, through threat, reporting on issues of national import and public interest.

It is not without note that this case continues to garner international attention as Oki awaits trial. At the IFJ 29th World Congress in France in last month, more than 300 journalist leaders representing more than 180 journalist organisations (and more than 600,000 journalists globally) unanimously endorsed a [motion](#) highlighting Oki Raimundos' case. The Congress condemned your government's action and called on Timor-Leste's leaders to immediately withdraw the charges and revert the case to the Press Council as is international standard.

Without doubt, Timor Leste needs a robust legal framework, but it must be one that incorporates and undergirds press freedom. It also needs a leader who strives to uphold such democratic values.

It is our belief that the criminal charges pending against journalist Oki Raimundos and the *Timor Post* threaten a wider chilling effect on the East Timorese media. With reporting on issues related to your leadership and governance at the heart of this issue, we again strongly urge you to exercise the power of your executive office to drop these misguided and potentially damaging charges.

We look forward to your next reply.

Signed,

International Federation of Journalists
South East Asia Journalist Unions
Committee to Protect Journalists
Freedom House