

August 22, 2016

Mr. Rui Maria de Araújo,
Prime Minister, Timor-Leste

Re: Defamation charges against Raimundo Oki and Laurencu Martins Vincente

Your Excellency,

I write on behalf of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) regarding the defamation charges against Timor Post journalist, Raimundo Oki, and former Editor of the Timor Post, Laurencu Martins Vincente. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) represents more than 600,000 journalists in 140 countries.

These defamation charges relate to a factual error in Raimundo Oki's reporting on November 10, 2015, about a government tendering process made when you were an advisor to Timor-Leste's Minister of Finance. The Timor Post, in response, printed your denial of any illegal activity in a front page article on November 17, 2015 and a further clarification of Oki's report was published on November 18, 2015.

Despite this due diligence which covered the right of reply in accordance with Article 34 of Timor-Leste's press law you have persisted with this defamation charge. Since April 11, 2016 the case has sat in the State Prosecutor's office with a decision to lay criminal charges still pending.

The fact that in Timor-Leste, criminal law allows the investigation and prosecution of journalists for inaccuracy or what is deemed "unfair" reporting is unacceptable in any democratic nation. Moreover, it is even more disappointing to note that Timor-Leste, a long-fought-for democracy has these laws at all. Timor-Leste's democracy should be strong enough to permit a free and robust press. This case unfortunately highlights the on-going crack down on the country's media freedom and freedom of expression.

As the Prime Minister, you have the power to order the immediate release of Oki and Vincente and end this violation of media freedom.

The IFJ and its affiliates urge you to set an example and preserve Timor-Leste's hard-earned democracy which its people have fought valiantly for. We encourage you to drop the case and refer it to the Timor-Leste Press Council.

Timor-Leste is at a pivotal moment in its democratic development and cases like this shatter the integrity of the government's commitment to democracy and media freedom. We call on you to act immediately.

Yours sincerely



Anthony Bellanger
General Secretary