

April 22, 2016

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

Dear Prime Minister Araújo

We, the undersigned, representing the global media support and freedom of expression advocacy community, strongly urge for the Prime Minister's office to withdraw the defamation case against journalist Oki Raimundos and Lourenco Vicente Martins, of *Timor Post*.

The case against Oki and *Timor Post* is based on a published a report from November 10, 2015, which contained a factual error on a government tendering process. In accordance with Timor Leste's own Press Law, the outlet subsequently published a correction and right of reply from the Prime Minister's office in relation to the story. In spite of this, you have filed a criminal defamation lawsuit that carries potential prison sentences against Oki, Vincente and *Timor Post*.

As Timor Leste prepares to officially launch its own Press Council on World Press Freedom Day, May 3, the international media community is both disappointed and concerned that such an action is being pursued and strongly urge for you to unconditionally drop the charges and stop using legal threats to harass Timor Leste's journalists.

We remind you that the Timor Leste Penal Code decriminalised defamation when it was introduced in 2009. Yet this particular case brings to light contradictions in Timor Leste law which are now clearly being used to launch defamation lawsuits through other means. Specifically, Article 285(1) has been applied in this case under the "slandorous denunciation" clause, which by our reading is in violation of both your country's constitution, namely Article 41, as well as your commitments to free expression as a signatory to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

We reiterate that this defamation complaint against Oki and Lourenco threatens to significantly undermine press freedom in Timor Leste by engendering a culture of fear and intimidation among journalists who report on issues of national import. Such action also serves to weaken the view of media freedom in Timor Leste in the eyes of the international community. The revival of criminal defamation in this case is in contravention to global trends and the country's own positive steps to support a strong and independent media.

We strongly urge you to call on the prosecutor general to drop these damaging charges and to consider legal reforms that abolish Article 285 and other legal clauses that undermine your country's constitutional commitment to protecting and upholding press freedom."

Signed:

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
Freedom House
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
South East Asia Journalist Unions (SEAJU)