



**JUDICIAL SYSTEM MONITORING PROGRAMME**  
**PROGRAMA MONITORIZASAUN SISTEMA JUDISIAL**

*Press Release*

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**JSMP congratulates the women of Timor-Leste as we celebrate National Women's Day**

Every year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November Timor-Leste celebrates National Women's Day. The 3<sup>rd</sup> November is an important day for women across the nation of Timor-Leste because it has been granted the status of a National Day for Women. This commitment shows that the government of Timor-Leste acknowledges the importance of women's contributions, roles and involvement in the context of achieving freedom and national development.

However, as part of JSMP monitoring conducted in the District Courts of Dili, Baucau, Suai and Oecusse, JSMP has found that the majority of cases heard by the courts concern cases related to gender based violence.

These cases include domestic violence, sexual assault against underage girls and women, sexual harassment, abandonment and other crimes that each in turn increases the future burden on the State. Moreover, women continue to face major and complex challenges as the result of a number of technical/procedural provisions that in practice are not being interpreted in a sensitive and proportional manner. Specifically, Article 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code continues to present the biggest structural challenges to victims of domestic violence in obtaining justice in their cases.

Although JSMP is pleased that the Court of Appeal has issued a decision regarding conflicting interpretations of Article 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, JSMP continues to encourage the Court of Appeal to raise awareness on a wide scale and ensure that the aforementioned decision is implemented in practice across all of the courts, and court actors should also be obliged to have a common understanding about how this article is to be interpreted.

The Executive Director of JSMP, Luis de Oliveira Sampaio, stated that "*JSMP congratulates all of the women of Timor-Leste and all cross-sections of the community who have taken part in the movement to eradicate violence against women who are celebrating this National Women's Day, and invites all sides to reflect on what has been done, and what needs to be strengthened in the future to break the chain of violence against women*".

JSMP hopes that the celebration of National Women's Day will enable all cross-sections of the community to continue to strive and work hard to strengthen institutional cooperation and solidarity to ensure that all people, namely both men and women, have equal choices, opportunities and rights to be free from all forms of violence against their person, especially domestic violence which continues to undermine the basic rights and freedoms of Timorese women as the most dignified beings in the world.

JSMP understands that women, especially those residing in isolated areas, are still struggling to overcome a range of structural challenges in order to defend their constitutional rights, due to the influence of local customary practices which are often discriminatory and don't consider women to have the same rights, obligations and status as men. Nevertheless, JSMP urges everyone to keep the faith and continue to fight against all forms of violence, discrimination and other acts that impede and undermine the interests of women.

JSMP urges the sovereign organs of State, especially the government, to set up adequate systems and policies to ensure that women's groups can obtain adequate protection and to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms available to protect women from all forms of violence .

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