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**Press Release**  
*10 December 2015*

**CEDAW Committee recommends Timor-Leste takes action to address violence against women and promote women's access to justice**

On 20 November 2015, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) issued its final conclusions on Timor Leste's progress in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Committee made its conclusions after receiving written reports from the Government of Timor-Leste and civil society organisations, including JSMP. On 11 and 12 November 2015, in Geneva, the Committee also heard presentations from the Government and civil society organisations, and held question and answer sessions with both groups.

Several of the Committee's recommendations emphasised Timor-Leste's obligations under CEDAW to protect victims of gender based violence and to guarantee their access to justice.

"JSMP values the CEDAW Committee for raising important points relating to women's access to justice and violence against women, which JSMP and other civil society organisations expressed concern with. JSMP believes that the State of Timor Leste has a large role to play in eliminating discrimination and ensuring policies or laws do not discriminate against women. JSMP hopes that the Government of Timor-Leste will take immediate action to implement these recommendations," said the Executive Director of JSMP, Luis de Oliveira Sampaio.

Timor-Leste acceded to CEDAW without reservation in 2003. CEDAW requires State Parties to take immediate action to eliminate discrimination in the lives of women. In order to adhere to its obligations under CEDAW, Timor-Leste must take all necessary steps to adopt and integrate the principles of CEDAW in its national laws, national policies and national development plans.

According to article 18 of CEDAW, State Parties must periodically report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on factors and difficulties affecting the fulfilment of their CEDAW obligations. Timor Leste's first report was submitted in 2009 and this year the Committee considered the second and third reports together.

The CEDAW Committee expressed its concern at the lack of an effective legal aid system in Timor-Leste. The Committee recommends that effective legal aid organisations be established to respond to the economic hurdles faced by women seeking to access the formal justice system. In this regard, the Committee recommends that court costs be reduced for women with low incomes and waived for women living in poverty.

The Committee is concerned about the lack of training and information on women's rights and gender equality for judicial actors. The Committee recommends that the Government of Timor-Leste ensure, through regular education sessions and capacity building, that all branches of government understand CEDAW and the Committee's recommendations. To ensure gender equality and women's advancement, CEDAW should be applied in all related court decisions and should be considered when developing all new laws and policies.

In relation to violence against women, the Committee raised concerns about the increasing rate of domestic violence in Timor-Leste, including incest and the sexual abuse of girls. The Committee emphasised that only a small number of cases are reported due to fear of stigmatisation and a general lack of awareness about the criminal nature of domestic violence. The Committee recommended that the Government of Timor-Leste take measures to encourage women to report cases of domestic violence, and to ensure there is satisfactory prosecution and punishment of domestic violence. The Committee also underlined the importance of providing compensation to women and child victims to provide redress for the emotional and psychological harm they have suffered and to cover any financial costs, including medical bills.

The Committee also recommended that the Law On Witness Protection be prioritised so that witnesses in domestic violence cases feel safe and can access justice, health services, psychological care, safe houses and counselling. The Committee also recommended that Timor-Leste establish an integrated system for data collection and reporting of gender based violence, to enable it to assess the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at promoting women's human rights.

Timor-Leste will submit its next report to the CEDAW Committee in 2019, including reporting on progress implementing the Committee's recommendations described above.

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