



Press Release
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Timor-Leste commemorates International Women's Day: 'Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change'

On 8 March 2019 Timor-Leste celebrates International Women's Day which is an important day for recognising and respecting the contribution of East Timorese women and women in other countries to promote equality, respect and to guarantee women's rights without discrimination and violence against women. The theme for this year's International Women's Day is **“Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change.”**

“JSMP believes that this theme will further highlight efforts taken to date to promote change for women in terms of their participation and social movements for change in society, however the State needs to create a clear and strict mechanism or policy to combat violence against women in society,” said the Executive Director of JSMP, Luis de Oliveira Sampaio.

The struggle for gender equality and women's participation in Timor-Leste is a unique one, particularly after the occupation, considering the role of women during the independence era. During the occupation many women gave their lives and suffered a wide range of violence to save their family members (husbands, fathers or brothers) from military persecution because of their political activities during the struggle for national liberation. Some suffered as the result of losing their family members, others suffered rape as a form of payback for their husband's or brother's political activities against the occupation, and some were tortured and suffered other structural violence. These women continue to suffer psychologically to date because of trauma and the lack of

appropriate mechanisms to facilitate a proper rehabilitation process for them.

The history of violence against women has continued during the independence era, even though it has been in different forms and of a different nature, and violence is a very critical issue for women and girls in Timor-Leste.

Studies show that many women suffer gender based violence, in a range of serious forms, including domestic violence, neglect, rape, and some women even lose their lives because of domestic violence. Specifically regarding the rape of women, a study carried out by the Asia Foundation in 2015 found that 34 of women aged 15-49 had experienced sexual violence during their life. 41% suffered this experience at the hands of their intimate partner, and 14% experienced rape committed by a person who was not their intimate partner.

In 2018 JSMP monitored a total of 1036 cases and 652 (63%) of these cases involved gender based violence and 553 cases (79%) involved domestic violence and the rest involved other types of crimes.

It does not stop there, because women also face a range of structural challenges relating to the process of accessing formal justice when violence is committed against them. Sometimes victims do not report these cases of violence for a number of reasons. For example they are pressured by their families to resolve the problem in accordance with traditional practices, they are concerned about social stigmatization, they lack knowledge about the formal justice system, as well as the perception that violence that occurs in the home, should stay in the home. When the legal system fails to convict defendants and provide justice for victims, this further impedes the ability of victims to seek reparation through the formal justice system.

Politically the State has introduced a wide range of initiatives on the promotion of gender equality and to combat gender based violence, but these policies and initiatives have not yet been able to resolve the

problem of violence against women, as shown by data gathered by JSMP through court monitoring.

JSMP hopes that the commemoration of International Women's Day will get everyone, especially State institutions, to do their very best to end violence against women. Specifically, JSMP recommends for the State to carry out a massive and extensive campaign to promote a policy of zero tolerance for violence against women.

JSMP would like to take advantage of this important moment to congratulate women all around the world, and particularly women in Timor-Leste, who have sacrificed themselves to protect women's rights and to bring about significant change for women.

For more information, please contact:

Luis de Oliveira Sampaio
Executive Director of JSMP
Email: luis@jsmp.tl
Website: www.jsmp.tl