

8th March 2004

## JSMP Report reveals significant barriers for women's access to justice

In celebration of International Women's Day JSMP would like to highlight some of the problems women face accessing the formal justice system in East Timor.

"Currently, the situation faced by women in the courts is extremely worrying. Problems identified by JSMP range from a general failure of the prosecution on domestic violence related crimes, repeated and lengthy delays in cases leading to significant barriers for women victims' access to justice. These problems reveal a possible gender-bias by court actors and the judicial system. This bias has the potential to result in cases not being processed in an effective and sensitive manner." stated JSMP.

In addition, JSMP concludes that there is an urgent need to take measures to rectify this situation. These and other issues are included in the report 'Women in the Formal Justice Sector' to be released in the following weeks. This report is based on the monitoring of the Dili District Court during three months in late 2003.

Some of the recommendations in the report include the need for further training for police, prosecutors and judges as well as the guarantee of legal representation to women victim of crimes. JSMP welcomes initiatives to improve the ability of women to effectively access the justice system. JSMP urges the government to take immediate and urgent action to support women victims and to guarantee their rights to secure justice for violence against them. The Draft Domestic Violence Law, currently under discussion, contains various mechanisms for supporting women: and JSMP believes that such measures will assist in remedying the disadvantaged position of women before the justice system.

"It is important to tackle these problems faced by women from different angles, including legal developments, training and raising the awareness of court actors and communities." – said JSMP.

JSMP expects that this report can be used as a tool for further discussion and can ultimately assist in the development of measures to guarantee the rights of women in the formal justice system in East Timor.

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