

## **Special Panel accepts two guilty pleas**

JSMP, Dili 5 April 2002

The Special Panels of the Dili District Court this week decided to accept pleas of guilty in two serious crimes cases, thereby allowing the court to avoid a full trial. Both Marcurious Jose de Deus and Augusto dos Santos pleaded guilty to murder charges and are now awaiting sentencing. The only time this has happened before was in the first case heard by the Special Panel, that of Joao Fernandes, back in January 2001.

The trial against Marcurious Jose de Deus, a member of the Laksaur militia, commenced on Tuesday this week. He is charged with one count of murder of Rosalina Cardoso Belak in Manekiik village, Covalima district on 6 September 1999. Before any witnesses were called, the accused was given an opportunity to make a statement in which he admitted committing the murder and stated that he regretted what he had done. He stated that he was acting on the orders of the militia commander, but said he was not forced. After a short break, the Special Panel, comprised of Judge Antero Luis (Portugal) presiding, Judge Benfeito Mosso Ramos (Cape Verde) and Judge Antonio Helder (East Timor), announced that it accepted the admission of guilt. The sentence will be announced on 18 April 2002.

The following day, Wednesday, a differently constituted Special Panel announced that it had accepted the admission of guilt made by Augusto dos Santos. Dos Santos, a member of the Ami Hametin Integrasi (AHI) militia, is charged with participating in the murder of Antonio Ribeiro in Aileu on 4 September 1999. The trial commenced on 19 March 2002 but had been adjourned after the accused's admission for the Special Panel, comprised of Judge Sylver Ntukamazina (Presiding), Judge Benfeito Mosso Ramos (Cape Verde) and Judge Maria Natercia Gusmao Pereira (East Timor), to consider whether or not to accept it. The sentence will be announced on 17 April 2002.

In other news, the Same crimes against humanity trial, which was due to commence yesterday, has been further postponed due to administrative problems within the court. The court announced that the case will recommence on 27 May 2002.

Also yesterday, the trial against East Timorese former TNI soldier, Gaspar Leite, continued in Dili. Two witnesses testified that they were taken away by the accused but saw the corpse of the victim. The court is now considering whether to accept the autopsy report into evidence. Leite is charged with the murder of Domingus Maukinta in Aileu district on 9 September 1999. The trial will continue on 11 April 2002.

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