



JSMP Press Release

29 April 2005

The Serious Crimes Unit Conducts Community Outreach Sessions

On 22 April 2005 the Serious Crimes Unit (SCU) travelled to Liquiça as part of its 'Community Information Program'.

According to an official document of the SCU the aim of the program is to explain:

- The mandate of the SCU and why it ends in May 2005;
- The balance of the work of the SCU, emphasizing information as to cases investigated and indicted for each district;
- The process of handing-over files to national authorities; and
- Future issues relating to the serious crimes process after May 2005, including the role of the UN Commission of Experts.

The SCU also intends to conduct a question and answer session for members of the community as part of this program.

JSMP attended the information session in Liquica, and previously attended a session in Same, in order to monitor the effectiveness of the program. In Liquica, thirty people, including 15 high school students, attended the meeting but

JSMP was informed that many people from the area did not know that the meeting was to be held and were therefore unable to attend.

Members of the SCU briefly explained the workings of the SPSC and what had happened in relation to crimes committed in Liquiça in 1999. They told those attending that the SPSC would finish hearing all trials by 20 May and that the SCU, which is responsible for investigating and prosecuting cases before the SPSC, would hand its case files over to the Timorese authorities after that date.

Community members expressed great frustration that the SCU was closing and that, as far as they could see, there would be nothing to replace it. People attending the meeting were also upset that, whilst commanders had been indicted, there were other people who had committed crimes in 1999 who had not been indicted and consequently remained free in the community. The members of the SCU focused on the massacre in Liquiça Church on 6 April 1999, but people were also concerned about the need for justice for the numerous other crimes perpetrated in Liquica in 1999.

Community members also demanded to know why investigations of crimes committed against family members had failed to result in indictments. They expressed concern that the SCU was closing and felt that the government of Timor Leste would not be able to bring perpetrators to justice following its closure.

The conduct of information sessions for members of the community affected by the violence perpetrated in 1999 is extremely important in JSMP's view and the SCU's program is to be welcomed for that reason. Nevertheless, the scheduling of these meetings is, in JSMP's view, far too late to be genuinely effective. It is also clear to JSMP that the sessions are too short and, as a result, there is only a limited opportunity for members of the public to ask questions of the SCU staff. The SCU must also disseminate information on the program more widely and at the earliest possible date to ensure as much community participation as possible.

Additional meetings will be held in Viqueque on 30 May, in Baucau on 6 May and in Los Palos on 7 May with the final meeting to be held in Dili on 9 May. Each of these meetings is scheduled to commence at 9am.