

Judicial System Monitoring Programme (JSMP)

JSMP Press Release

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UN Security Council must support the serious crimes process in East Timor

Crucial issues are being overlooked in the Security Council debate over a future United Nations mission for East Timor. The discussions currently taking place at the Security Council have focused on whether a peacekeeping or police force is the most appropriate way of securing law and order under a new UN mandate. Alarmingly, the future of the Serious Crimes Unit and funding for the trials before the Special Panels for Serious Crimes has not attracted sufficient attention. JSMP is of the opinion that the serious crimes process is closely linked with the future peace and security of East Timor. Serious crimes trials that meet international standards are an integral aspect of the reconciliation process and only through adequate and sustained funding can the objectives of the Special Panels be achieved.

JSMP has just released a report entitled 'The Future of the Serious Crimes Unit' (available at <http://www.jsmp.minihub.org>) which discusses the impact reduced funding would have on the body that prosecutes serious crimes before the Special Panels. The report argues it is essential that the Serious Crimes Unit's mandate is extended and funding expanded until the serious crimes process is completed or until East Timorese staff can adequately investigate and prosecute serious crimes cases without international support.

JSMP hopes this report will inform the Security Council debate and will refocus attention on the importance of the Serious Crimes Unit and the justice sector more generally. This issue should be at the forefront of discussion as by 19 May 2004 approximately 40-50% of the estimated 1400 murder cases from 1999 will remain uninvestigated. Despite the obvious need for more investigation resources, the number of UN Police Investigators was scaled down in December 2003 from 23 to 8 and one of three Serious Crimes Unit offices – that in Oecusse – has been closed.

JSMP strongly recommends that the current trend be reversed and that the Security Council recognise the importance of the serious crimes process in East Timor.

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