



JUDICIAL SYSTEM MONITORING PROGRAMM
PROGRAMA MONITORIZASAUN BA SISTEMA JUDISIÁRIU

Press Release

**Suai District Court
27 January 2014**

Suai District Court not functioning for more than a week

Between the 20th-24th January and the 27th-28th January 2014 the Suai District Court did not conduct any trials because there were no judges available. After seeking clarification with the local court clerk it was confirmed that trials were scheduled for the 23rd and 24th January but they did not take place because all of the judges were attending a meeting in Dili. In addition, on the 24th, 27th and 28th January 2014 the court did not schedule any trials for reasons that remain unclear. Currently there are four permanent judges and one trainee judges at the Suai District Court.

“JSMP is very worried about this situation because for almost 2 weeks, from the 16th and 17th January until now, the court has not been functioning. This situation will have a huge impact on the cases that have to be tried and settled” said the Executive Director of JSMP, Luis de Oliveira Sampaio.

JSMP realizes that judges have to participate in all of the important meetings organized by the Court of Appeal to discuss general issues and challenges facing the judges, especially in relation to issues of safety and the well-being of judges in the performance of their work. However JSMP encourages the judges to properly manage the available resources to prevent the possibility of a non-functioning court for a period of almost two weeks. These situations have been avoided in Dili and Baucau where the courts have been functioning normally.

Also, JSMP has received information that the Oecusse District Court has not been functioning until today because a case scheduled for trial requires a panel of judges and the local court only has one judge. The Oecusse District Court can only start functioning and conducting hearings on 3 February 2014.

JSMP believes that the effectiveness and consistency of the trial scheduling process as well as the productivity of the legal institutions is critical to build and strengthen community trust in the justice sector. JSMP has noted that acts of violence have been prevalent, including cases of aggravated murder. JSMP suspects that this situation could be indicative that community members are not really sure that their cases can be processed through the formal legal institutions and they take justice into their own hands, because the formal legal process takes a long time, is very bureaucratic, and there are delays for reasons unknown and a number of other technical obstacles that have to be overcome.

Previously, JSMP questioned the trial schedule at the Baucau, Suai and Oecusse courts on 16-17 January 2014, because after they carried out their duties these courts did not conduct any hearings because no dates were set/scheduled.

JSMP hopes that from this week onwards the courts will start to function normally, so that the principle of a fair trial (simple, speedy, affordable) continues to be upheld by all of the courts.

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