



Press Release
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Commemoration of International Children's Day

JSMP requests for the Government to guarantee the rights of the child to access justice in relation to the spread of Covid-19 and the State of Emergency

On 01 June each year the whole world, including Timor-Leste, commemorates International Children's Day to acknowledge, guarantee, promote and respect the fundamental rights of children. Many children suffer from a range of violence, discrimination and sexual abuse in many countries, including Timor-Leste, and children have continued to suffer violence during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2019 JSMP monitored 52 cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse involving children from all the district courts. From this total, the most prevalent type of crime was the sexual abuse of a minor which occurred in 24 cases. However, this number only represents those cases observed by JSMP at the courts and does not include all of the cases tried by the courts. JSMP believes that there are many more cases that do not get reported to the formal justice system for a range of reasons, such as a lack of knowledge about the legal process, limited resources, and other social problems.

Meanwhile, based on data that JSMP obtained from the PNTL via the VPUs (Vulnerable Person's Units) in the municipalities of Aileu, Same, Baucau and Oekusi between January-April 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic the VPUs registered 81 cases of gender based violence that included children.

“JSMP is very concerned about the continuous high number of cases involving violence against children at the courts. We all need to address this situation, especially the State, to give top priority and to create a responsive policy that guarantees adequate protection for children, so that they can have special treatment to enjoy their rights and freedoms in accordance with the protections provided in the Constitution”, said Ana Paula Marçal, Executive Director of JSMP.

Article 18 of the Timor-Leste Constitution on child protection states that: (1) Children shall be

entitled to special protection by the family, the community and the State, particularly against all forms of abandonment, discrimination, violence, oppression, sexual abuse and exploitation. (2) Children shall enjoy all rights that are universally recognized, as well as all those that are enshrined in international conventions commonly ratified or approved by the State. (3) Every child born inside or outside wedlock shall enjoy the same rights and social protection.

Based on these provisions, the State and all people have the obligation to provide maximum protection to children and need to put the interests of children above all other interests. Therefore, JSMP continues to demand for the National Parliament, in this legislature, to give priority to amending the Penal Code to include a specific article on incest without consideration of age and consent and also to give priority to the discussion and approval of a Draft Law on Child Protection.

JSMP congratulates all children around the world, especially children in Timor-Leste and hopes that the commemoration of International Children's Day will enable everyone to fight against all types of violence and discrimination against children, because they are the future of the nation.

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