



Timor-Leste

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The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
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1. Introduction

- 1.1** CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations (CSOs) and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world. Founded in 1993, CIVICUS has members in over 180 countries throughout the world.
- 1.2** The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 86 organisations in 23 countries that works to promote and protect human rights, including the right to development, through collaboration and cooperation among human rights organisations and defenders in Asia and beyond.
- 1.3** The Timor-Leste Institute for Development Monitoring and Analysis (La'o Hamutuk, 'Walking Together' in English) is an independent, non-partisan CSO in Timor-Leste that analyses, educates and advocates on government policy to encourage better equity, human rights and sustainability. Since its founding in 2000, it has produced hundreds of articles, presentations, radio programmes, submissions, testimonies and web pages relating to human rights, petroleum dependency and social and economic justice, with the objective of helping people in Timor-Leste have the knowledge and tools needed to ensure that policy decisions reflect their needs and interests.
- 1.4** The Judicial System Monitoring Program (JSMP) was established in 2001 to monitor the processes of the Ad Hoc Human Rights Tribunal in Jakarta, Indonesia, and the Special Panels for Serious Crimes in Timor-Leste. The JSMP now exists as a Timorese-led CSO that works to improve the judicial and legislative systems in Timor-Leste through advocacy to promote legality, accountability, the rule of law and transparency.
- 1.5** In this submission, the four organisations examine the Government of Timor-Leste's compliance with its international human rights obligations to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for civil society. We analyse Timor-Leste's fulfilment of the rights to freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly and unwarranted restrictions on human rights defenders (HRDs) since its previous UPR examination in 2021. We assess Timor-Leste's implementation of recommendations relating to these issues received during the 3rd UPR cycle and provide follow-up recommendations.
- 1.6** During the 3rd UPR cycle, the Government of Timor-Leste received five recommendations relating to the space for civil society (civic space). It accepted all five recommendations. However, an evaluation of a range of legal sources and human rights documentation addressed in this submission demonstrates that it has partly implemented three recommendations and failed to implement two.

- 1.7** The government has not taken steps to address unwarranted civic space restrictions since its last UPR examination. Implementation gaps were found in relation to the rights to expression and peaceful assembly.
- 1.8** We are deeply concerned by incidents of arrest of HRDs and harassment of journalists for undertaking their work and a proposed law criminalising defamation recently introduced into parliament.
- 1.9** We are further alarmed by the failure to revise the Law on Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration (No. 1/2006) that governs the management of assemblies and incidents of arrest and excessive force during protests.
- 1.10** As a result of these issues, civic space in Timor-Leste is currently classified as narrowed by the CIVICUS Monitor, indicating that while freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly are broadly respected and protected, some restrictions remain.¹
- Section 2 of this submission examines Timor-Leste's implementation of UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards concerning freedom of association.
 - Section 3 examines Timor-Leste's implementation of UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards related to the protection of civil society activists, HRDs and journalists.
 - Section 4 examines Timor-Leste's implementation of UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards concerning freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information.
 - Section 5 examines Timor-Leste's implementation of UPR recommendations and compliance with international human rights standards related to freedom of peaceful assembly.
 - Section 6 contains recommendations to address the concerns raised and advance implementation of recommendations under the 3rd cycle.
 - Section 7 is an annex on the implementation of 3rd cycle UPR recommendations related to civic space.

2. Freedom of association

- 2.1** During Timor-Leste's examination under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government received one recommendation directly related to the right to freedom of association. The

¹ CIVICUS Monitor: Timor-Leste, <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/timor-lestehttps://monitor.civicus.org/country/timor-leste/>.

government supported the recommendation to ‘refrain from passing new laws that could unduly restrict freedom of association’. As evidenced below, the government has partly implemented the recommendation and has generally respected this freedom.

- 2.2** Article 43 of the Timor-Leste Constitution guarantees the right to the freedom of association.² Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Timor-Leste is a state party, also guarantees freedom of association. In practice, the government has generally respected and protected the right to the freedom of association. CSOs in Timor-Leste have played a critical role in strengthening democracy through active engagement with the government to influence legislation and policies and monitor government projects and expenditure, and to implement services.
- 2.3** CSOs in Timor-Leste operate under a relatively enabling legal environment. Most CSOs are registered under Decree Law 5/2005 On Non-Profit Making Corporate Bodies.³ The law recognises ‘the role played by associations in the exercise of democracy and of citizenship’. CSOs may be constituted in the form of either an association or foundation and must be registered with the Ministry of Justice. International CSOs are also governed by Law No. 5/2005 and are required to register through the same process as local CSOs.
- 2.4** However, according to a report by the European Union System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE), practical barriers, such as the absence of online systems, high reliance on in-person notarisation and indirect costs, disproportionately affect rural and excluded groups.⁴ Appeal mechanisms when registration is denied, exist in theory but remain opaque and rarely utilised. Compliance obligations, including quarterly tax identification renewals and mandatory social security contributions, add administrative burdens that smaller CSOs struggle to meet. The resourcing environment is also constrained. Donor funding has declined sharply since the post-independence period and government support remains minimal.
- 2.5** Workers may form and join labour unions and bargain collectively, although a 2012 law requires written notification of demands and a response from employers in

² ‘Timor-Leste’s Constitution of 2002’, Ministry of Justice, https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/ConstituicaoRDTL_Portugues.pdf. For an English translation, see <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/ConstitutionEng.pdf>.

³ ‘Decree Law No. 5/2005 on Non-Profit-Making Corporate Bodies’, Ministry of Justice https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2002_2005/decreto_lei_governo/5_2005.pdf.

⁴ ‘Timor-Leste Country Focus Report’, EU SEE, 25 November 2025, <https://eusee.hivos.org/document/timor-leste-country-focus-reporthttps://eusee.hivos.org/document/timor-leste-country-focus-report/>.

advance of striking.⁵ If employers do not respond or if an agreement is not reached within 20 days, five days' notice is required for a strike. In practice, few workers are unionised due to high unemployment and informal economic activity.⁶

- 2.6** There are concerns about a ban on martial arts groups.⁷ The initial ban imposed in November 2023 stemmed from concerns about possible links between martial arts and violent acts such as criminal behaviour, outbreaks of communal violence and politically partisan mobilisation and intimidation. The government cited continued public safety risks as justification for the suspension that it has extended multiple times, most recently until the end of 2026.⁸ The government's decision has been met with outrage by martial arts leaders and advocates, who argue that any direct correlation between martial arts and violence in the community is tenuous.⁹

3. Harassment and arrests of civil society activists, human rights defenders and journalists

- 3.1** Under Timor-Leste's previous UPR examination, the government received one recommendation on the protection of civil society activists, HRDs and journalists. The government was urged to 'ensure a safe, secure and enabling environment, in law and in practice, for human rights defenders and journalists to carry out their work without fear of acts of intimidation or reprisals'. The government supported the recommendation and in general has partly implemented it. However, there have been incidents of harassment of HRDs and journalists.
- 3.2** Article 12 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders mandates states to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of HRDs.
- 3.3** According to information received, HRDs who mobilise in support of pro-independence movements in Kashmir, West Papua, and Western Sahara are often visited by intelligence officers and face intimidation.¹⁰ Activists for West Papua, a

⁵ 'Law No. 5/2012: Strike Law', https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/tls_e/wtaccts5_leg_25.pdf.

⁶ Timor-Leste, Freedom House, 2024, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/timor-leste/freedom-world/2024>.

⁷ 'Timor-Leste: Press freedom rankings drop, protesters detained, while martial arts ban extended', CIVICUS Monitor, 4 June 2024, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-press-freedom-rankings-drop-protesters-detained-while-martial-arts-ban-extendedhttps://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-press-freedom-rankings-drop-protesters-detained-while-martial-arts-ban-extended/>.

⁸ 'Govt. Extends Suspension of Martial Arts Activities Until End of 2026', Tatoli IP News Agency, 3 June 2026, <https://en.tatoli.tl/2026/06/03/govt-extends-suspension-of-martial-arts-activities-until-end-of-2026/16https://en.tatoli.tl/2026/06/03/govt-extends-suspension-of-martial-arts-activities-until-end-of-2026/16/>.

⁹ 'Timor-Leste Bans Martial Arts, Citing an Increase in Violence — But Trainers and Advocates are Fighting Back', ABC News, 10 May 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-10/timor-leste-bans-martial-arts/103819944>.

¹⁰ Consultation with civil society activists, June 2026.

region under Indonesian rule with a long-running independence movement, may face harassment. For example, human rights activist Nelson Roldão, who has been involved in solidarity actions for West Papua, was detained on 2 September 2024. Roldão went to Nicolau Lobato International Airport to accompany a West Papuan friend who was returning to Indonesia. On his way out, intelligence officers stopped him because he was carrying a bag marked with a sign of solidarity with West Papua. They began to interrogate him before one of the officers suddenly pulled out a gun and pointed it at him. They also kicked him. He was then detained at the Border Force office, where officers went through his bag and found a West Papuan Morning Star independence flag, banners and T-shirts they had made ahead of Pope Francis's September 2024 visit to Timor-Leste. After being detained for two hours at the airport and interrogated, he was taken to the office of the Timor-Leste Kaikoli Command and then to the office of the Criminal Investigation Directorate at the Police Command Centre, where he spent more than two hours before his release.¹¹

- 3.4** Pope Francis's visit saw heightened sensitivity by the authorities towards civil society activists. For example, on 10 September 2024, police arrested physically disabled activist Nelson Barros Pereira Xavier on the day after the Pope's arrival. Xavier was arrested for holding flags of Timor-Leste and the Vatican with the slogans 'Free West Papua' and 'Free Palestine' written on them. He was released after a few hours.¹²
- 3.5** Journalists have been targeted for publishing stories authorities object to. For example, in May 2022, Parliamentary Affairs and Social Communication Minister Francisco Martins da Costa Pereira Jerónimo sued Francisco Belo Simões da Costa, editor-in-chief of news portal Hatutan.com, after he published a story on the minister's alleged involvement in a fraudulent set-top box installation project. As a result, the Dili District Prosecutor's Office charged him with defamatory false information, otherwise known as slanderous denunciation, under article 285 of the Penal Code.¹³
- 3.6** In another example, Raimundos Oki, chief editor of news portal Oekusipost.com, was charged in June 2022 following an investigative report on events at the Topu Honis Shelter in Kutet, Oecusse. According to Oki's report, the public prosecution police

¹¹ 'Timor-Leste: Ban on solidarity protests on West Papua and arrest of activists', CIVICUS Monitor, 8 November 2024, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-ban-on-solidarity-protests-on-west-papua-and-arrest-of-activists><https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-ban-on-solidarity-protests-on-west-papua-and-arrest-of-activists/>.

¹² 'Timor-Leste: Restrictions on solidarity protests are unconstitutional', CIVICUS Lens interview, 4 September 2024, <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/7265-timor-leste-restrictions-on-solidarity-protests-are-unconstitutional>.

¹³ 'Timor-Leste: Journalist sued over report alleging ministerial corruption', International Federation of Journalists, 30 May 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/timor-leste-journalist-sued-over-report-alleging-ministerial-corruption>.

detained around 30 underage girls for two weeks in June 2020 and performed forced virginity tests on them. He was charged for allegedly breaching ‘judicial confidentiality’ under article 291 of the Penal Code, with a penalty of one to six years’ imprisonment. The report centred on evidence-gathering practices during the trial of American priest Richard Daschbach in Timor-Leste, who was sentenced to 12 years in prison in December 2021 for sexually abusing children under his care.¹⁴ The prosecution subsequently discontinued the charges against Oki and subsequently closed his case.

- 3.7** In October 2022, the International Federation of Journalists reported that the National Police of Timor-Leste had summoned two journalists after they published an article on a minister’s request to dismiss Gastão Pereira, the Director of Internal Intelligence at the National Intelligence Service. Jorginho dos Santos, the editor-in-chief of the *Jornal Independente*, and journalist Domingos Gomes received letters from law enforcement summoning them to a police station. Their article detailed allegations that Timor-Leste’s Deputy Minister of Justice, José Edmundo Caetano, had sent a letter to senior government officials requesting the resignation of Pereira for his failure to comply with disclosure regulations.¹⁵
- 3.8** In September 2024, reporter Antonieta Kartono Martins from Diligente Online, who was reporting on the eviction of street vendors in the capital, Dili, was detained during a police operation. She was released hours later without charge. Police also confiscated and deleted footage from the camera of Suzana Cardoso of Media One Timor-Leste.¹⁶
- 3.9** Online abuse may also be a growing problem. In March 2025, in an interview released to ABC News on an investigation into online gender-based violence against journalists in the Indo-Pacific, Timorese journalist Zita Menezes from Hatutan.com revealed that she had been the target of online abuse.¹⁷

4. Freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information

¹⁴ ‘Timor-Leste: Journalist charged for investigative report’, International Federation of Journalists, 5 July 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/timor-leste-journalist-charged-for-investigative-report>.

¹⁵ ‘Timor-Leste: Two journalists summoned by police’, International Federation of Journalists, 25 October 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/timor-leste-two-journalists-summoned-by-police>.

¹⁶ ‘Rare arrest of a journalist in Timor-Leste: authorities reaffirm commitment to press freedom’, ABC, 9 September 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/rare-arrest-journalist-timor-leste-authorities-reaffirm-commitment-press-freedom>.

¹⁷ ‘Just part of being a woman and a reporter? Resisting the barrage of online violence against female journalists’, ABC, 21 March 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/abc-international-development/250321-fighting-back-against-online-gbv/105081434>.

- 4.1** Under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government received three recommendations relating to freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information. For example, the government pledged to ‘ensure that the proposed criminal defamation law, cybercrime law, and data privacy and protection law do not unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression’ and ‘revise the media law to ensure that it is in line with international standards’. It accepted all three recommendations but has only partly implemented one and failed to implement the other two.
- 4.2** Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedoms of expression and opinion. Article 40 of the constitution also guarantees the right to freedom of expression. It states that ‘all persons have the right to freedom of expression and the right to inform and be informed impartially’ and that ‘the exercise of freedom of expression and information cannot be limited by any type of censorship’. Further, article 41 states that ‘freedom of the press and other means of social communication is guaranteed’, and goes on to say that this comprises, ‘the freedom of expression and creativity for journalists, the access to information sources, editorial freedom, protection of independence and professional confidentiality, and the right to create newspapers, publications and other means of diffusion’.¹⁸
- 4.3** Timor-Leste is ranked 30th in the Reporters Without Borders 2026 World Press Freedom Index. The country’s media are among the freest in the region and journalists are usually free to report the news.¹⁹
- 4.4** However, there are laws and provisions that could be used to criminalise expression. The government has yet to revise the Media Law (No. 5/2014) that was passed in 2014, which contains provisions that can undermine freedom of expression and media freedom. While explicitly recognising the rights to freedom of expression and press freedom, the Media Law stipulates that to work as a journalist, individuals are required to have undergone a six-month internship in a media organisation and be accredited by a Press Council. These provisions mean that bloggers, citizen journalists, freelance media workers, student journalists and others could be barred from carrying out journalistic work. The law also bars individuals who work for CSOs, government departments and political parties from being registered and accredited as journalists. Such criteria are inconsistent with international standards that an accreditation procedure should impair the right to gather news as little as possible and that accreditation decisions should be based on non-discriminatory criteria.
- 4.5** The Media Law’s article 3.1 also requires the media to promote ‘the national culture, values and identity’ of Timor-Leste and ‘social stability and harmony’. Article 3.2

¹⁸ ‘Timor-Leste’s Constitution of 2002’, op. cit.

¹⁹ Timor Leste, Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/country/timor-leste>.

requires the media to ‘encourage and support economic policies’. Any breaches of these provisions could trigger fines against journalists and media outlets.²⁰

- 4.6** Article 285(1) of the Penal Code criminalises ‘defamatory false information’, otherwise known as slanderous denunciation, although it has rarely been used since 2016 (see section 3.6).
- 4.7** Criminal defamation was removed from the Penal Code in 2009 but there have been efforts to reinstate it. In May 2026, members of parliament presented amendments to the Penal Code that would criminalise defamation (article 187-A), which is defined as ‘making statements or allegations that damage a person’s honour, reputation, or good name before third parties’.²¹ This would be punishable with between one and three years’ imprisonment or a fine. For ‘aggravated cases involving mass communication, public electronic networks, knowingly false allegations, or allegations of criminal conduct’ an individual could be sentenced to between two and five years in prison or a fine. The proposed draft also included the criminalisation of insult (article 187-B), defined as ‘direct offensive expressions against a person’s honour’, punishable by up to two years’ imprisonment or a fine. For ‘aggravated dissemination through media or public electronic networks’ the sentence could be a prison sentence of up to four years or a fine. Civil society and media advocates criticised the defamation bill as undermining democratic progress.²²
- 4.8** There are also concerns about proposals brought forward in 2024 to draft a cybercrime bill aimed at tackling online misconduct and criminal activity.²³ Minister of Justice Sérgio Hornay stated that the bill, being drafted with input from the Prosecutor’s Office, aimed to address misuse of social media, including the spread of inappropriate language and criticism of national leaders. However, civil society groups expressed concerns that the law may be used to suppress dissent and curb online freedom by disproportionately focusing on protecting the reputations of political elites. The Timor-Leste Journalists Association echoed these concerns,

²⁰ ‘Law No. 5 /2014 Informal Translation of the Media Act, Ministry of Justice, 19 November 2014, https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/tls_e/wtaccts9_leg_1.pdf.

²¹ ‘Proposed amendments to Penal Code’, La’o Hamutuk, May 2026, https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/defamation/2026/PJL7a_alterCodigoPenalPt.pdf.

²² ‘Proposed Criminal Code additions to Criminalize Defamation and Cybercrime’, La’o Hamutuk, 20 August 2020, <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/defamation/2020/20DefamLaw.htm>; ‘Media Advocates in Timor-Leste Call Defamation Bill A Setback for Democracy’, Pacific Beat, 5 June 2026, <https://www.abc.net.au/pacific/programs/pacificbeat/timor/106762588>.

²³ ‘PN government to present cyber crime law’, 11 March 2024, La’o Hamutuk, <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/defamation/cybercrime/240311TatoliGovernu-PN%20sei%20aprezenta%20lei%20crime%20sibernetika.pdf>.

emphasising risks to media freedom and cautioning against potential censorship under the guise of regulation.²⁴

- 4.9** The right to freedom of information is protected under the constitution. Decree-Law 43/2016 on Rules Relating to Access to Official Documents facilitates access to information.²⁵ However, the implementation of the law is severely hampered by secrecy provisions in other statutes. There are also concerns about the law's procedures, with too much information needing to be supplied for a request, limited requirements to provide assistance to applicants and undue charges for requests. Information may be issued in Portuguese, which most Timorese people cannot read or speak.²⁶

5. Freedom of peaceful assembly

- 5.1** During Timor-Leste's examination under the 3rd UPR cycle, the government did not receive any recommendations on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- 5.2** Article 42 of the constitution guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, without a need for prior authorisation. Article 21 of the ICCPR also guarantees this right. However, in practice there have been a number of instances where the exercise of this right has been unduly restricted.
- 5.3** The Law on Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration (No. 1/2006) governs the management of assemblies.²⁷ While the law only requires organisers to notify the police of planned protests, the National Police of Timor-Leste continue to misinterpret the law as requiring protest organisers to obtain permission. The police have used this as a basis to disrupt or restrict several protests by activists and students.
- 5.4** Article 5 of Law No. 1/2006 also places unreasonable restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by prohibiting assemblies and demonstrations 'within less than 100m from offices of organs of sovereignty, residences of officeholders of organs of sovereignty, military and militarised installations, prison buildings, offices of diplomatic missions and consulates, and offices of political parties'. Civil society

²⁴ 'Timor-Leste: Concerns around cyber crime bill, harassment of journalists and martial arts ban', CIVICUS Monitor, 4 June 2025, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-concerns-around-cyber-crime-bill-harassment-of-journalists-and-martial-arts-banhttps://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-concerns-around-cyber-crime-bill-harassment-of-journalists-and-martial-arts-ban/>.

²⁵ Republic Journal Series 1, No. 40A, Justice Ministry, 14 October 2016, https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2016/serie_1/SERIE_I_NO_40a.pdf.

²⁶ Freedom House: Timor-Leste, 2024, op. cit.

²⁷ EU SEE, 25 November 2025, <https://eusee.hivos.org/document/timor-leste-country-focus-report/> op. cit.; Republic Journal Series 1, No. 2, Justice Ministry, 8 February 2026, https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2006/serie_1/serie1_no2.pdf.

argues that this restriction prevents them from holding effective protests against the government and is inconsistent with international law. The Human Rights Committee has stated that ‘the designation of the perimeters of places such as courts, parliaments, sites of historical significance or other official buildings as areas where assemblies may not take place should generally be avoided, among other reasons, because they are public spaces’. Further, participants must as far as possible be enabled to conduct assemblies within sight and sound of their target audience.²⁸ Because of the close proximity of government buildings and diplomatic missions in Dili and its location close to the sea, the requirement under the Law on Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration makes it virtually impossible for protesters to organise a demonstration within sight and sound of their target.

- 5.5** Police may respond to protests with detentions. In November 2022, the National Maubere Alliance organised a protest outside parliament against what it called elite policies that ignored the needs of the majority of the population. On 14 November 2022, police detained 37 protesters on the basis that they considered the protest to be illegal. They subsequently charged 26 protesters for ‘disobedience to an order of dispersal’ under article 193 of the Penal Code for failing to comply with the place restrictions under article 5 of the Law on Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration. All protesters were then released without conditions. On 16 November 2022, police detained activist Miguel Arcanjo Monsil, the lead coordinator of the demonstrations, after he had been called by the police for a dialogue. He was subsequently released.²⁹
- 5.6** In February 2024, The Timor Leste National Police detained 10 teachers for holding a demonstration at the Ministry of Education Building without obtaining a permit from the Dili District Police Command, even though a permit was not required. Veronica dos Santos, a teacher who took part in the demonstration, said that they had come to speak with the Minister of Education about their contracts and the problems they were facing, because the Minister of Education had ignored them for months.³⁰
- 5.7** During the 2024 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People’s Forum in Timor-Leste, the organising committee reported concerns that Indonesian intelligence personnel were present to conduct

²⁸ ‘General comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21)’, UN Human Rights Committee, 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fGC%2f37&Lang=en.

²⁹ ‘Protesters criminalised in Timor-Leste while journalists continue to face harassment’, CIVICUS Monitor, 31 December 2022, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/protesters-criminalised-timor-leste-while-journalists-continue-face-harassmenthttps://monitor.civicus.org/explore/protesters-criminalised-timor-leste-while-journalists-continue-face-harassment/>.

³⁰ CIVICUS Monitor, 4 June 2024, op. cit.

surveillance, given that several discussions addressed politically sensitive issues, including human rights, militarism and state violence.³¹

- 5.8** The government banned all protests in solidarity with West Papua ahead of and during Pope Francis's visit in September 2024, describing such actions as a threat to national security, apparently under pressure from the Indonesian government. According to activists, these restrictions were unconstitutional because they contradicted articles 10 and 40 of the constitution on the right to solidarity and the right to freedom of expression. The ban was also inconsistent with the ICCPR.³²
- 5.9** In September 2025, Timor-Leste police fired teargas at people protesting against a plan to buy new official cars for lawmakers and lifetime pensions for high-ranking government officials.³³ Over 1,000 people, mostly university students, rallied near parliament to protest against a plan approved in 2024 to allocate US\$4 million to buy cars for each of the 65 members of parliament. The demonstration, organised by the Timor-Leste University Students organisation, began peacefully, but police fired teargas after some protesters allegedly hurled rocks towards parliament. The teargas injured at least four protesters, who were taken to a nearby health facility.³⁴ Protests continued until 16 September 2025 as around 2,000 protesters returned to the streets. Police arrested and detained at least 12 protesters from the student group for hours before releasing them.³⁵ In response to the protests, parliament cancelled the car procurement plan and repealed a law that provided lifetime pensions to former parliamentarians.
- 5.10** On 16 March 2026, protests were organised by young people who were seeking to become cadets in the Timor-Leste national police. The young people said there was favouritism in the recruitment process and called for the process to be cancelled pending review. The protest action against the Minister of Interior took place at the

³¹ Consultation with civil society, op. cit.

³² 'Timor-Leste: ban on solidarity protests on West Papua and arrest of activists', CIVICUS Monitor, 8 November 2024, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-ban-on-solidarity-protests-on-west-papua-and-arrest-of-activists> <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-ban-on-solidarity-protests-on-west-papua-and-arrest-of-activists/>.

³³ 'Protests Pull the Brakes on Timor-Leste's Political Pampering', East Asia Forum, 13 November 2025, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2025/11/13/protests-pull-the-brakes-on-timor-lestes-political-pampering> <https://eastasiaforum.org/2025/11/13/protests-pull-the-brakes-on-timor-lestes-political-pampering/>.

³⁴ 'Timor-Leste police fire tear gas at protest over plan to buy cars for MPs', Channel News Asia, 15 September 2025, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/timor-leste-police-fire-tear-gas-protest-over-plan-buy-cars-mps-5350191>.

³⁵ 'Timor-Leste: Parliament scraps plans on cars and lifetime pensions after student protests mobilised', CIVICUS Monitor, 7 October 2025, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-parliament-scraps-plans-on-cars-and-lifetime-pensions-after-student-protests-mobilised/> ; 'Timor-Leste: 'When young people organise, even security forces have to listen'', CIVICUS Lens interview, 24 May 2026, <https://lens.civicus.org/interview/timor-leste-when-young-people-organise-even-security-forces-have-to-listen>

National University of East Timor in Dili. On 18 March 2026, police used teargas against protesters at the campus. At least seven people were reported to be injured and had to be taken to the Vera Cruz Health Centre for treatment.³⁶

6. Recommendations to the Government of Timor-Leste

CIVICUS, FORUM-ASIA, La'o Hamutuk and the JSMP call on the Government of Timor-Leste to create and maintain, in law and in practice, an enabling environment for civil society, in accordance with the rights enshrined in international human rights law and standards, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and Human Rights Council resolutions 22/6, 27/5 and 27/31.

At a minimum, the following conditions should be guaranteed: freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly, the right for civil society to operate free from unwarranted state interference, the right to communicate and access information and the right to seek and secure funding.

In the light of this, the following specific recommendations are made:

16.1 Freedom of association

- Take measures to foster a safe and enabling environment for civil society, including by removing legal and bureaucratic measures that unwarrantedly limit the right to association.
- Lift the blanket ban on martial arts groups and ensure any restrictions on freedom of association are consistent with international human rights law and standards.

16.2 Protection of civil society activists, human rights defenders and journalists

- Ensure a safe, secure and enabling environment, in law and in practice, so that civil society activists, HRDs and journalists can carry out their legitimate work.

³⁶ 'Timor-Leste: Protests against the police recruitment process and calls for reforms to improve press freedom', CIVICUS Monitor, 10 April 2026, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-protests-against-the-police-recruitment-process-and-calls-for-reforms-to-improve-press-freedomhttps://monitor.civicus.org/explore/timor-leste-protests-against-the-police-recruitment-process-and-calls-for-reforms-to-improve-press-freedom/>.

- Conduct impartial, transparent, thorough and effective investigations into all cases of attacks, harassment, intimidation or reprisals against civil society activists, HRDs and journalists and bring the perpetrators of offences to justice.
- Ensure that civil society activists, HRDs and journalists are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear or undue hindrance, obstruction or legal and administrative harassment.
- Publicly condemn at the highest levels of government instances of harassment and intimidation of civil society activists, HRDs and journalists.
- Adopt a specific law or mechanism to ensure the protection of HRDs in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 27/31 and the UN Human Rights Defenders Declaration.

16.3 Freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information

- Ensure the rights to freedom of expression and media freedom by bringing all national legislation into line with Timor-Leste's international obligations and other international standards.
- Revise the Media Law to ensure it is in line with international standards and best practices related to the exercise of the right to the freedom of expression.
- Ensure that civil society, journalists and writers can work freely and without fear of retribution for expressing critical opinions or covering topics that the government may deem sensitive. As part of this, adopt a framework for the protection of journalists from harassment, intimidation and persecution.
- Decriminalise defamation in the Penal Code and refrain from introducing new laws or provisions that limit offline or online expression.
- Ensure that any cybercrime laws that are introduced are consistent with international human rights law and standards and are not used to restrict or block online expression and violate privacy and personal data protection.
- Revise Decree-Law 43/2016 on Rules Relating to Access to Official Documents, or adopt a new law on access to information, in line with international standards, to promote the full exercise of the right to access information.

- Refrain from adopting any laws that provide for censorship or undue control over social and conventional media content.

6.4 Freedom of peaceful assembly

- Adopt best practices on the freedom of peaceful assembly, as put forward by the 2012 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, which calls for simple processes for the notification of assemblies being held rather than permission being required.
- Amend the Law on Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration (No. 1/2006), particularly articles 5, 6, 7 and 15, to guarantee fully the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, in line with international law and standards.
- Ensure that protests can be held within sight and sound of their targets.
- Conduct immediate and impartial investigations into all instances of arbitrary arrests and use of excessive force by security forces in the context of protests.
- Review and, if necessary, update existing human rights training for police and security forces, with the assistance of international experts and independent CSOs, to foster more consistent application of international human rights standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms.
- Publicly condemn at the highest levels all instances of arbitrary arrests and the use of excessive force by security forces in response to protests. Launch formal investigations into such instances and bring the perpetrators to justice.
- Refrain from engaging in surveillance by intelligence agencies during CSO events, including by the Ministry of Interior and state intelligence bodies.
- Provide recourse to judicial review and effective remedy, including compensation, in cases of unlawful denial of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and use of excessive force by state authorities.

6.5 Access by UN Special Procedures mandate holders

- Extend a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedure mandate holders and prioritise official visits by the: 1) Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; 2) Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the

Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression; and 3) Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association.

6.6 State engagement with civil society

- Include CSOs in the UPR process before finalising and submitting the national report.
- Systematically consult with civil society on the implementation of UPR recommendations, including by holding periodical comprehensive consultations with a diverse range of civil society.
- Incorporate the results of this UPR into action plans for the promotion and protection of all human rights, taking into account the proposals of civil society, and present a midterm evaluation report to the Human Rights Council on the implementation of the recommendations of this session.
- Publicly commit to refraining from undertaking reprisals against CSOs and individuals engaging with international human rights bodies and mechanisms and to creating a safe and enabling environment for civil society to operate freely and independently.

7. Annex: Assessment of implementation of civic space recommendations under the 3rd cycle

Recommendation	Position	Assessment/Comments on level of implementation
116.76 Refrain from passing new laws that could unduly restrict freedoms of expression or association (United States of America); Source of position: A/HRC/50/12/Add.1	Supported	Status: Partially implemented Source: Section 2
116.79 Ensure a safe, secure and enabling environment, in law and in practice, for human rights defenders and journalists to carry out their work without fear of acts of intimidation or reprisals (Uruguay); Source of position: A/HRC/50/12/Add.1	Supported	Status: Partially implemented Source: Section 3
116.75 Ensure that the proposed criminal defamation law, cybercrime law, and data privacy and protection law do not unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression, both online and offline (Canada); Source of position: A/HRC/50/12/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
116.77 Revise the media law to ensure that it is in line with international standards and best practices related to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression (Uruguay); Source of position: A/HRC/50/12/Add.1	Noted	Status: Not implemented Source: Section 4
116.78 Continue to guarantee freedom of expression (France); Source of position: A/HRC/50/12/Add.1	Noted	Status: Partially implemented Source: Section 4