

Hero Journalist J. A. Belo Being Persecuted, Needs Support

By Allan Nairn, posted at News and Comment, www.allannairn.com

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Many cultures have equivalents of the English-language saying “No good deed goes unpunished,” maybe because there’s sometimes something about decent people that can make them look like easy targets.

When East Timor was in its heroic phase, enduring tribulations that made the Bible look placid, one of the heroes was a young aspiring journalist named Jose Antonio Belo.

When, amidst liberation, Belo took me on a tour of the place where he had been tortured, he pointed to a spot where a message had been scrawled in blood by a co-detainee who hadn’t made it.

(Belo and colleagues were hung from the rafters by SGI, a special Indonesian Intel unit incorporating BIA and Kopassus Group 4, both with special US intel liaison. The Indonesian armed forces illegally occupying East Timor were, as a whole, US-backed, but these commando /intel outfits that electroshocked Belo and others got special US funding, training and encouragement, all this in the Clinton years; see my “Indonesia’s ‘Disappeared’,” *The Nation* [US] June 8, 1998 [<http://www.etan.org/news/news2/disapprd.htm>], “Indonesia’s Killers,” *The Nation* [US], March 30, 1998 [<http://www.etan.org/news/news2/killers.htm>], and my September 30, 1999 testimony to the US House International Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee of the House Committee on International Relations “Hearing on the Humanitarian Crisis in East Timor” at <http://www.etan.org/legislation/999bhear.htm>).

Today East Timor is independent, thanks to people like J.A. Belo, and, as a result, East Timorese now live more normal-scale injustice, instead of epic daily massacre.

One of the remarkable things about Jose Belo was that, even as his homeland was burning, he still stayed devoted to the ideal of accurate handling of facts.

But now that devotion has gotten him in trouble once again since he’s reported facts about a high official that that official -- Timor Leste’s Justice Minister, Lucia Lobato, doesn’t like, and so she’s trying to jail and/or heavily fine him based on Timor’s criminal defamation law which, incredibly, has been lifted wholesale from the laws of their old oppressor/occupier, Indonesia, and under which, as one official told Belo, it doesn’t matter if the facts are accurate.

The newspaper which Belo now edits, *Tempo Semanal*, includes material in Tetum, Portuguese, and English and can be seen online and contacted at: <http://www.temposemanaltimor.blogspot.com>

The International Federation of Journalists (www.ifj.org) and the East Timor and Indonesia Action Network (www.etan.org) have expressed support for Belo, but he needs resources and allies to defend himself and continue speaking like a free man.