East Timorese journalists ... an endangered species in the face of the controversial media law. Image: Cafe Pacific

Friday, August 29, 2014

Item: 8931

SYDNEY (International Federation of Journalists / Pacific Media Watch): The Sydney-based Asia-Pacific office of the International Federation of Journalists has launched a global petition protesting against a controversial ‘press law’ passed earlier this year by Parliament, partially rejected by the Appeal Court as “unconstitutional” and awaiting presidential approval.

The IFJ's online petition describes the law as "incompatible with the basic principles of freedom of expression, the practical workings of a free media and the needs of a modern democracy".

The petition added: “Journalism should not be criminalised. Journalists should not be licensed at the whim of government appointed committees.”

Thirty three international journalists, including SBS Dateline's Mark Davis, Crikey editor Marni Cordell, broadcaster George Negus, investigative journalist John Pilger, ABC Four Corners produce Peter Cronau and Pacific Media Centre director Dr David Robie, are among those who have signed the petition launch document.

The petition statement said:

"We, the undersigned journalists and media of Australia, respectfully urge the President, Government and Parliament of Timor Leste, to reject the current proposed Media Law. The laws are incompatible with the basic principles of freedom of expression, the practical workings of a free media and the needs of a modern democracy.

Whatever the best intentions of the proposed legislation are, the potential for political abuse by future administrations is enormous.

The proposed legislation will leave journalists open to an endless array of fines and criminal prosecutions. It will force journalists to work to a vague list of national and economic objectives. It will place the right of both citizens and journalists to write, publish and express themselves into the hands of a potentially politicised committee.

"Journalism should not be criminalised. Journalists should not be licensed at the whim of government appointed committees.

"We urge you to reconsider this legislation."

Signed:

Mark Davis. Dateline, SBS TV

David Marr. Journalist, The Guardian Australia

Ruth Pollard. Middle East Correspondent, The Sydney Morning Herald

Tony Jones. Presenter Q&A, ABC TV

Ben Doherty. The Sydney Morning Herald, Fairfax
Sophie McNeill, Foreign Correspondent, ABC TV
Steve Pennells, Journalist, The West Australian
Chris Bath, TV Anchor, Seven Network News
Rove McManus, Presenter, The Project
Zoe Daniel, Presenter, Foreign Correspondent, ABC News
Marni Cordell, Editor, Crikey News
George Negus, Veteran International Journalist
Ginny Stein, African Correspondent, ABC News
David O'Shea, Dateline, SBS TV
Sue Spencer, Executive Producer Four Corners, ABC TV
David Dare Parker, Photojournalist
Jock Cheetham, Journalist, The Sydney Morning Herald, Fairfax
Sarah Ferguson, Journalist, ABC TV
John Pilger, Journalist, Author & Documentary Filmmaker
Dr David Robie, Director, Pacific Media Centre
Mark Colvin, Presenter, ABC Radio
Peter Manning, Former Head of ABC TV News and Current Affairs; Former Head of Current Affairs, Seven Network.
Yalda Hakim, Presenter/Correspondent, BBC World News
Olivia Rousset, Independent Journalist
Yaara Bou Melhem, Dateline SBS TV, Al Jazeera International
Matt Brown, Middle East Correspondent, ABC
Helen Davidson, Journalist, The Guardian Australia
Michael Bachelard, Indonesia Correspondent, The Sydney Morning Herald
Chris Graham, Editor, New Matilda
John Garnaut, Asia Pacific Editor, The Sydney Morning Herald
Lee Glendinning, Journalist, The Guardian Australia
Phil Thornton, Freelance Journalist in Southeast Asia
Peter Cronau, Senior Producer/Journalist, Four Corners, ABC TV

Sign the East Timor media law petition

More background

East Timor court ruling sparks confusion

Timor-Leste's Parliament handed 'humiliating' defeat

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