



Rede Defensór Direitus Umanus (RDDU / Human Rights Defenders Network  
Rua Karaketu, Mota Ain Nú.8, Faról Dili Timor-Leste

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Press Release 9 April 2018

## **The Early Election Campaign is an Opportunity to Debate and Present Programs in the Public Interest, not to Provoke and Insult Each Other**

The Human Rights Defenders Network *Rede Defensór Direitus Umanus*, asks State officials and political leaders in Timor-Leste to ensure that the early election will be free, fair and civic, to continue to promote existing peace and stability.

The Human Rights Defenders Network issues this press release on the basis of Constitution article 6(b) and 6(c) about the Objectives of the State, and article 40 about the Freedom of Expression and Information. We are concerned about current political developments and the continuous provocation and offensive political propaganda among political party leaders. These actions and behaviors risk escalation to violence and could affect stability in our nation.

The Network recognizes the importance of freedom of expression in a democracy, and that this freedom is very broad. We defended this freedom during our 24-year struggle. It is strongly guaranteed in the RDTL Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which have been ratified by Timor-Leste. The Network suggests that leaders use the freedom of expression with responsibility, provide examples to others, and respect other people's human rights.

The Human Rights Defenders Network asks all leaders to be open to critiques from anyone, because of your important roles and powers to govern the nation's people and because your behavior and decisions impact on the life of the country's citizens. The Network is concerned that recently there have been some investigations of ordinary citizens who have been accused in relation to opinions they have shared publicly, even though the Penal Code does not include defamation as a crime.

The Network asks all leaders, especially of political parties and coalitions, to measure all their public communications, to focus on words that are educative, promote peace and stability, and to avoid insulting and humiliating others during the campaign and the whole electoral process. We do not intend to lecture our leaders or to limit freedom of expression, however we feel obligated to share our views, to promote healthy debate between all political leaders in the upcoming early elections, rather than the exchange of insults and humiliation which have no positive value for the people.

We appreciate that the independent electoral body brought all political parties and coalitions together, and that they recently signed a Pact of National Unity to ensure that the election will be free and peaceful. We appreciate and hope that leaders, members and supporters of the political parties and coalitions will follow this commitment, making statements and respecting each other, to secure peace and stability.

The Timorese people have suffered greatly, during the illegal occupation by Indonesia and since independence, in 2006-- 2008 during the military crisis, and in 2014-2015 during political tension. These events inflicted suffering on large numbers of people, many until death. The past is a lesson for all of us, and we should not repeat crime and violence in the future. We believe that the political leaders must strengthen national unity.

We also ask the electoral bodies to guarantee inclusion for everyone, to make maximum efforts to ensure that persons with disabilities can fully participate in the entire electoral process, without any discrimination, and to promote the equal rights of every person.

Therefore, the Human Rights Defenders Network calls:

1. On all State leaders to avoid provocation or language that is not in line with the principles and values of democracy, human rights and justice, as the people wish to live peacefully;
2. On all political party leaders to avoid using language which insults and humiliates each other during the campaign, but to use the political stage to speak about the parties' programs that are in the public interest, in an educative and not provocative manner;
3. On all members and supporters, to continue to participate in the campaign and the entire electoral process, peacefully and therefore contributing to strengthening national stability;
4. On security institutions, especially the national police (PNTL), to continue to maintain security in accordance with the law, with complete impartiality, and to respect human rights when they respond to any problems;
5. On the electoral bodies, to guarantee and protect the maximum participation of voters with disabilities.

Thank you very much for your attention.

/s/

Laura Afonso de Jesus

Coordinator of the Human Rights Defenders Network

On behalf of the members of the Human Rights Defenders Network:

1. Asosiasaun HAK
2. Asosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita (ACBit)
3. Asisténsia Legal Feto no Labarik (ALFeLA)
4. Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)
5. Asosiasaun Halibur Defisiénsia Matan Timor-Leste (AHDMTL)
6. Belun
7. Community Based Rehabilitation Network(CBR)
8. Coalition for Diversity and Action (CODIVA)
9. Fundasaun Mahein (FM)
10. The Judicial System Monitoring Program (JSMP)
11. La'o Hamutuk