



Timor-Leste: Civil society has played a critical role in strengthening democracy, but civic space shortfalls remain

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Statement at the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council



Video:
<https://youtu.be/-dIUbrfDKEo>

Adoption of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report of Timor-Leste

Delivered by Marta da Silva, La'o Hamutuk

Thank you, Mr President.

La'o Hamutuk, JSMP, HAK, Forum Asia and CIVICUS welcome the government of Timor-Leste's engagement with the UPR process.

Civil society played a critical role in achieving Timor-Leste's sovereignty and strengthening democracy, and human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society members are largely able to work without fear of reprisals.

However, there is still more to be done to strengthen the right to freedom of expression. Some journalists have faced threats, and some practise self-censorship to deal with such intimidation. We welcome that Timor-Leste accepted a recommendation to revise the Media Law, which contains provisions that can undermine freedom of expression and media freedom. During the review, states also made recommendations in relation to attempts by the government to introduce draft laws that could further stifle freedom of expression, including the proposed Criminal Defamation Law and Cyber Crime Law. We are further alarmed by restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly and the arbitrary arrests of protesters.

We call on Timor-Leste to address these concerns and ensure a safe, secure and enabling environment for human rights defenders and journalists to carry out their work. Specifically, the government should implement recommendations relating to civic space and:

- Revise the Media Law to ensure it is in line with international standards and refrain from introducing new laws or provisions limiting either offline or online expression.
- Ensure that journalists and civil society organisations can work freely and without fear of retribution for expressing critical opinions or covering topics that the government may deem sensitive.
- Ensure that human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear or undue hindrance, obstruction or harassment and adopt a specific law to ensure the protection of human rights defenders.
- Amend the Law on Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration to guarantee fully the right to the freedom of peaceful assembly in line with international law and standards.
- Improve avenues for transparency and public participation in policy-development to ensure that all citizens' needs and wishes are heard.

We thank you.