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PRESS RELEASE

Timor Leste: ARTICLE 19 Analyses Draft Media Policy

ARTICLE 19 has produced a Comment analysing the draft National Policy on Mass Communication prepared by the government of Timor Leste. We welcome ongoing efforts to establish a strong legal and policy framework for the media in Timor Leste, and note some very positive features in the draft Policy. At the same time, the Comment highlights a number of concerns with the draft Policy, including that it recommends a form of licensing for journalists and a strong role for government in relation to media regulation and support. We urge the government to revise the draft Policy to address our concerns.

There have been ongoing efforts in Timor Leste to put in place a comprehensive framework for media regulation, which is currently lacking. In March 2009, ARTICLE 19 published a Memorandum assessing the compatibility of a set of five draft laws on media regulation and the right to information – prepared on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme for consideration by the authorities in Timor Leste. Although we welcomed efforts to introduce a more developed regulatory framework, we were also critical of a number of the concrete proposals. Several of those criticisms also apply to the draft Policy.

The Comment highlights, among others, the following concerns with the draft Policy:

- Unduly vague statements which appear to reflect unfortunate approaches in the media laws analysed by ARTICLE 19 in March 2009.
- The suggestion that regulatory and subsidy programmes would be overseen directly by government, rather than by an independent body.
- Undue reliance on the idea of public subsidies, to the neglect of wider efforts to create an environment in which the media can be sustainable.
- The imposition of unreasonable obligations on the media, linked to more promotional subsidy initiatives.
- Accreditation (i.e. licensing) of journalists.
- Excessive restrictions on the content of what may be published or broadcast through the media.
- A failure to propose measures to enhance the independence of the public media.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Timorese authorities to ensure that the policy and regulatory environment for the media is fully in line with international standards, particularly in relation to freedom of expression.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- The Comment is available at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/comment-on-the-draft-national-policy-on-mass-communication-for-timor-leste.pdf>
- The draft Policy is available at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/laws/timor-leste-national-policy-on-mass-communication.pdf> and the Resolution is at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/laws/timor-leste-resolution.pdf>
- Our March 2009 analysis is available at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/timor-leste-draft-laws-regulating-journalists-the-media-and-the-right-to-inf.pdf>.
- For more information please contact: Toby Mendel, Senior Legal Counsel, a19law@hfx.eastlink.ca, +1 902 431-3688.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.