

**Australian Centre for Independent Journalism**

University of Technology, Sydney  
PO Box 123, Broadway NSW 2007  
Australia

18 February 2009

The President  
East Timor,

Dear Mr Ramos-Horta,

We are deeply concerned to learn that journalist Jose Belo is being charged with criminal defamation following the publication of an article in his newspaper Tempo Semanal alleging improper conduct by Justice Minister Lucia Lobato.

While making no comment on the merits of his allegations, we are disturbed by the application of criminal defamation laws against one of East Timor's bravest and most respected journalists.

Belo's role in documenting the atrocities of the Indonesian occupation and disseminating that information to the international media is well known. Since self government, Jose has emerged as one of the most productive, disciplined and independent journalists that East Timor has produced. He has become a key figure in the attempt to build a democratic media in your country. To be imprisoned by your government would be a great injustice to Jose and more importantly, a terrible precedent for all media in East Timor. Such laws criminalise and suppress good journalism, they help cloak corrupt and questionable behaviour of public officials and they diminish the reputation and international standing of the nations that apply them.

We note that the laws under which Jose Belo has been charged are left over from the old Indonesian regime, and understand that new laws more suited to a democratic society have been drafted but have not been placed before your parliament.

We pledge our support to Jose Belo and all East Timorese journalists who may face imprisonment for the practice of their profession. We urge you to take all actions within your power to bring about the dropping of this charge and the removal of Criminal Defamation laws in East Timor.

Respectfully



1. Wendy Bacon, Professor of Journalism, University of Technology, Sydney
2. Liz Jackson, Reporter, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

3. Quentin Dempster, Journalist, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
4. Sarah Ferguson, Reporter, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
5. David Marr, Reporter, Sydney Morning Herald
6. Lesley Power, General Counsel, SBS Television, Australia
7. Chris Nash, Professor of Journalism, Monash University
8. Mark Davis, Reporter, Dateline SBS Television, Australia
9. Matthew Moore, FOI Editor, Sydney Morning Herald
10. David O'Shea, Reporter, Dateline, SBS Television, Australia
11. Mark Dodd Defence/Foreign Affairs writer The Australian newspaper
12. Tony Jones, Presenter, Lateline, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
13. Sue Spencer , Executive Producer , Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
14. John Pilger, Filmmaker and Author
15. Tom Zubrycki, Filmmaker
16. Debbie Whitmont, Reporter, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
17. Lindsay Murdoch, The Age, Melbourne
18. Mark Colvin, Presenter of PM, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
19. Professor Stuart Rees, Director, Sydney Peace Foundation
20. Richard Ackland, Editor, Justinian
21. Eric Ellis, Forbes Magazine
22. Tom Morton, Senior Producer, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
23. Peter McEvoy, Journalist, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
24. Margaret Simons, Journalist and Author, Content Makers and Crikey
25. Marni Cordell, Editor, New Matilda
26. Sophie McNeill, Reporter, SBS Television, Australia
27. Philip Chubb, Associate Professor in Journalism, Monash University
28. Sally McCausland , Senior Lawyer, SBS Television, Australia
29. Hilary McPhee, writer and author ( former Chair of Australia Council)
30. Jacqui Ewart, Senior Lecturer in Journalism, Griffith University, New South Wales
31. Peter Manning, Adjunct Professor, University of Technology, Sydney
32. Hall Greenland, Editor of The Week, Australia
33. Gail Hambly, Group General Counsel, Company Secretary, Fairfax Media Ltd.
34. Professor Michael Fraser, Faculty of Law, University of Technology, Sydney
35. Jock Cheetham, Journalist, Sydney Morning Herald
36. Olivia Rousset , Journalist
37. Melanie Morrison, Dateline, SBS Television, Australia
38. Geoff Holland, Barrister & Lecturer in Law, University of Technology, Sydney
39. Gillian Leahy, Associate Professor, University of Technology, Sydney
40. Amos Roberts, Reporter, "Dateline" SBS Television, Australia
41. Lee Rhiannon, Member of the Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales
42. Ivan O'Mahoney – Producer, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
43. Michael Doyle, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
44. Caro Meldrum-Hanna, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
45. Judith Rodriguez, Melbourne Pen Centre
46. Ian Gerrard, Editor, The Diplomat, Australia
47. Julie Posetti, Freelance journalist & Journalism Lecturer, University of Canberra
48. Megan West, Lawyer, SBS Television
49. Michelle Baddiley , Archive Producer, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
50. Gail Phillips, Associate Professor of Journalism, Murdoch University
51. Martin Butler, Independent Filmmaker, Melbourne

52. Peter Cronau, Journalist, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
53. Maryann Keady, Independent Producer, Sydney
54. Associate Professor David Robie, Director, Pacific Media Centre, AUT University
55. Sue Ahearn, Journalist, ABC Melbourne
56. Maire Sheehan, Friends of Maliana, Sydney
57. Antony Loewenstein, Independent Journalist and Author
58. Sylvia Hale, Member of the Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales
59. Associate Professor Jake Lynch, Director, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
60. Joseph M Fernandez, Senior Lecturer, Journalism, Curtin University of Technology
61. Annette Blackwell, Lecturer in Journalism, University of Technology, Sydney
62. Jane Waddell, Convenor Mosman -Maubaro Friendship Committee, Sydney
63. Kate MacDonald, Producer, ABC Radio National
64. Sharon Davis, Radio Documentary, Radio National
65. Liam Phelan, Night Editor, The Sydney Morning Herald
66. Mike Carey, Freelance TV and Radio Producer, Australia
67. Associate Professor Peter Dunbar-Hall, Sydney Conservatorium of Music
68. Phil Thornton, Independent Journalist, Thailand
69. Gordon & Marie Esden, Birchgrove New South Wales
70. Kay Nankervis, Lecturer in journalism, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, Australia
71. Sally McCausland , Senior Lawyer, SBS Television, Australia
72. Jenna Price, Lecturer in journalism, University of Technology, Sydney
73. Eurydice Aroney, Lecturer and Radio Journalist, University of Technology, Sydney
74. Bonita Mason, Lecturer in journalism, Curtin University of Technology
75. Mignon Shardlow, Lecturer in journalism, Curtin University, Perth
76. Jahnnabi Das, Researcher, University of Technology, Sydney
77. Akhteruz Zaman, Researcher, University of Technology, Sydney
78. Damian Copley-Finch, Psychologist, Member of Friends of Maliana
79. Mignon Shardlow, Journalism lecturer, Curtin University, Perth
80. Dr Cassi Plate, Councillor, Leichhardt Municipal Council
81. Steven Scott, The Canberra Times
82. Sylvie Macbean, Fairfax Media
83. Adrian Kendrick, The Age, Melbourne
84. Monica Heary, Journalist, St George and Sutherland Shire Leader
85. Adam Hosfal
86. Rachel Smith, Fairfax Media
87. Robert Pullan, author and journalist
88. Kate Barton
89. Margaret Wells, Solicitor