

Australian Centre for Independent Journalism

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

18 February 2009

Prime Minister
East Timor
Mr Xanana Gusmao

Dear Mr Gusmao,

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 editor
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. Professor Michael Fraser, Faculty of Law, University of Technology, Sydney
34. Jock Cheetham, Journalist, Sydney Morning Herald
35. Olivia Rousset , Journalist
36. Melanie Morrison, Dateline, SBS Television, Australia
37. Geoff Holland, Barrister & Lecturer in Law, University of Technology, Sydney
38. Gillian Leahy, Associate Professor, University of Technology, Sydney
39. Amos Roberts, Reporter, "Dateline" SBS Television, Australia
40. Lee Rhiannon, Member of the Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales
41. Ivan O'Mahoney – Producer, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
42. Michael Doyle, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
43. Caro Meldrum-Hanna, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
44. Judith Rodriguez, Melbourne Pen Centre
45. Ian Gerrard, Editor, The Diplomat, Australia
46. Julie Posetti, Freelance journalist & Journalism Lecturer, University of Canberra
47. Megan West, Lawyer, SBS Television
48. Michelle Baddiley , Archive Producer, Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
49. Gail Phillips, Associate Professor of Journalism, Murdoch University
50. Martin Butler, Independent Filmmaker, Melbourne
51. Peter Cronau, Journalist, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
52. Maryann Keady, Independent Producer, Sydney
53. Associate Professor David Robie, Director, Pacific Media Centre, AUT University
54. Sue Ahearn, Journalist, ABC Melbourne

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