

# Draconian bill would criminalize defamation in Timor-Leste

The Timorese Prime Minister on 16 June said that the Council of Ministers still didn't have this document but that it "considers appropriate to provide for and punish (...) defamation." (photo : Lusa / [www.noticiasaoiminuto.com](http://www.noticiasaoiminuto.com))



Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls for the immediate withdrawal of a bill that would criminalize defamation in Timor-Leste again, six years after a similar law inherited from the Portuguese colonial era was removed from the criminal code as a result of the adoption of a new press code.

Under the **draconian bill unveiled by justice minister** Manuel Cárceres da Costa on 5 June, anyone convicted of "offending the honour and prestige" of a representative of the state or church in the news media or on social media would face up to three years in prison.

"Criminalizing defamation is the prerogative of authoritarian regimes," said Daniel Bastard, the head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk. "We therefore call on Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak to return to the road of democracy by immediately abandoning this unacceptable bill.

Defamation cases can be handled by creating a press arbitration council. If defamation cases go to court, they should be subject to civil law, never criminal law."

Timor-Leste is ranked 78th out of 180 countries and territories in **RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index** (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking>).