

Stuck in East Timor

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The former owner of Macau consultancy firm Olive Consultancy has appeared before the East Timor Prosecutor's Office 20 months after being detained in a money laundering investigation.

The owner of a Macau consultancy business appeared before East Timor Prosecutor's Office (MP) 20 months after being arrested in connection with a money laundering case, news agency Lusa reported.

Tiago Guerra was in pre-trial detention in the East Timor capital of Dili since October 2014 suspected of laundering money through Olive Consultancy, a firm he owned while working for Portugal Telecom in Macau in the 1990s. Guerra's wife Fong Fong, a Macau resident, was also arrested at the same time for the same court case as the couple were planning to return to Macau after many years of living in East Timor.

"I'm very sad that it took 20 months until we could speak and clarify many aspects of this situation," Guerra told Lusa following a court hearing that lasted for more than seven hours over three days.

The Portuguese businessman and former Macau resident lamented that he had only been heard regarding documents sent by his defence [lawyer] to the Prosecutor's Office more than 15 months after they had been delivered, Lusa reported.

East Timor shenanigans

Tiago Guerra was arrested after his consultancy firm worked as an intermediary for a money transfer to Bobby Boye, an American national and former East Timor government consultant.

In 2011, Guerra's firm performed an escrow service - a contractual arrangement in which a third party receives and disburses money or documents for the primary transacting parties - allowing Boye to be able to transfer US\$860,000 (MOP6.8 million) from a law firm in Norway to a society account in the United States, according to Portuguese newspaper Expresso

Boye was detained in the U.S. in June 2014 for stealing US\$43.5 million dollars from the East Timor Government during an oil related deal, Expresso reported.

After being detained for interrogation in 2014, Guerra was in pre-trial detention in the East Timor prison of Becora for about nine months.

After Guerra was released, he and his wife were prohibited from leaving the country and ordered to present themselves to the Dili police every week.

Not so swift justice

In April, the East Timor Public Prosecutor told Lusa that the local Prosecutor's Office had expected that after the case investigation finished between "August and October" of this year, the case will be archived or proceed to court.

East Timor Public Prosecutor Jose Ximenes told Lusa that the Office "asked for information from other countries" and had already received responses to information requests from Portugal and Macau but that "they were still waiting for other diligences to finish the case".

"We continue with our lives in limbo and hope the issue can be resolved as quickly as possible," Guerra told Lusa.