



JUDICIAL SYSTEM MONITORING PROGRAMME

PROGRAMA DE MONITORIZAÇÃO DO SISTEMA JUDICIAL

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PRESENTATION AT THE LAUNCH OF THE PARLIAMENT WATCH PROJECT (PWP)

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Introduction

JSMP was established as a national Timorese NGO in 2001 in order to monitor the progress of courts throughout Timor-Leste. Through court monitoring, legal analysis, report writing about developments in the justice system and dissemination of information, JSMP has shown its commitment to strengthening the justice system, democracy and the rule of law in Timor-Leste.

The National Parliament, as the centre of dynamic political decision-making in Timor-Leste, plays a central role in the process of national development. This is particularly the case as it is this body that is invested with the constitutional competency to produce laws. For these reasons, JSMP believes that it is important to observe the whole process of legal development in the National Parliament.

In 2010, with the support of the ASIA Foundation (TAF) and USAID, JSMP has decided to increase its monitoring activities in the National Parliament. This project is called the "Parliament Watch Project" (PWP) and has a total budget of \$ **39.218.00** for one year, with the opportunity to extend for two further years. In order to implement this project, JSMP has recruited two new research staff and receives technical support from an International Advisor.

The Project's Objectives

The objectives of this project are to monitor the National Parliament and disseminate information with a view to increasing the quality, transparency and accessibility of legislative processes. JSMP will assist the public and civil society to better understand and participate in the legislative development processes of the National Parliament. JSMP hopes that this project will also enable Members of Parliament to conduct more effective communication with their constituents and to gain a greater appreciation of the importance of accountability, transparency and consultation in the legislative system.

Context of the Project

In order to promote democratic values it is important that all citizens can access information about political and legislative processes. Citizens and civil society must have access to

information about how their representatives are executing their functions, exercising their powers remaining accountable to the public. Citizens must also understand how to provide their opinions to their representatives. If not, Members of Parliament will also have difficulty communicating with their constituents.

At present, although the Parliament has made good progress in many respects, the public and civil society have difficulty accessing information about the legislative process and draft laws. This is particularly the case because draft laws are always produced in Portuguese, a language that many citizens do not understand. It is also because many people also don't understand the legislative process and the avenues available for participation in that process. Addressing these problems will be very important in guaranteeing a strong, sustainable democracy for Timor-Leste.

The Project's Activities

Through the Parliament Watch Project, JSMP's Legal Research Unit will attempt to monitor the Parliament's plenary sessions, meetings of Committees, public hearings and other activities. Initially, JSMP will focus on plenary sessions and the activities of Committee A. When monitoring, JSMP will observe and record information about specific draft laws, the activities of Members of Parliament and the functioning of Parliament as a whole.

In order to increase the public's understanding of, and ability to participate in, democratic processes, JSMP will organize for groups of people, who will be significantly impacted by a particular draft law, to meet and discuss the proposed legal development. Such events will be called *Focus Group Discussions (FGD)*. At each FGD, JSMP will provide information about the specific draft law and will facilitate discussion of the law's impacts. JSMP will include the results of these discussions in its advocacy and, where appropriate, will make submissions to the Parliament. JSMP will also help people to come from the districts to attend and contribute to public hearings.

The PWP will involve dissemination of information about legislative developments to the Timorese public and civil society. This will be done through JSMP's website and mailing-lists, as well as through regular publications. JSMP will also conduct workshops in the districts about the legislative development process and how people can communicate their opinions to their representatives. Each month a JSMP staff member will travel to the districts to disseminate information about Parliament to community leaders, local NGOs and local media.

Finally, JSMP will produce and distribute a range of publications about developments in Parliament. These will include: Parliament Bulletins, Press Releases and an Annual Report. The Parliament Bulletins will include legal analysis on particularly important draft laws as well as information about the Parliament's activities and functions. Press releases will be published when JSMP considers it important to quickly provide the public with short pieces of information. The PWP Annual Report will include substantial legal analysis and information about parliament's progress in 2010.

That brings me to the end of my presentation on the Parliament Watch Project's activities. Thank you for your attention.