

# ALERT

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## Incidents of Sexual Violence in Dili's Public Spaces

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29 July 2014

Incidents of sexual violence<sup>1</sup> continue to concern communities across Timor-Leste. Over the past year, Belun's *Early Warning, Early Response (EWER)*<sup>2</sup> conflict monitoring system, media monitoring and other sources have reported numerous incidents of sexual violence. These kinds of incidents occur across the country, and have a profound impact on the social well-being of victims, their families and communities.

Given that sexual violence is a sensitive and therefore underreported category of incident, its prevalence is difficult to capture. However, Belun notes that monitoring over the past year has recorded a number of incidents of sexual violence in beachside areas and poorly lit streets of Dili. In particular, incidents have been recorded in public areas on the main beach road in Pantai Kelapa (from the US Embassy to the Farol Lighthouse), Bairo Formosa, and the beachside areas of Pantai Kelapa, Pertamina, Bebonuk, Tasi Tolu, Metiaut and Cristo Rei. The majority of the incidents recorded through EWER monitoring involved unknown perpetrators.

With the following recommendations, Belun hopes that coordinated efforts will be made to counter problematic attitudes and behaviours that can lead to incidents of sexual violence in our communities. Belun call on police, government and community leaders to work together to challenge harmful attitudes and norms towards women, and to create a society where all people, including women, are respected and can feel safe in both public and private spaces of Timor-Leste.

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<sup>1</sup> The term *sexual violence* is used in this alert to describe verbal or physical actions of a sexual nature that are unwanted and unwelcome. This includes, for example, unwanted sexual displays, comments, threats or suggestions, and physical sexual assaults, such as groping and rape. This definition adapted from the World Health Organisation's (WHO) handbook on sexual violence, : [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/global\\_campaign/en/chap6.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> For more information on EWER, see <http://belun.tl/en/early-warning-and-early-response-ewer/>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### The National Police of Timor Leste (PNTL)

- Through the Vulnerable Persons Unit (VPU), provide training to all PNTL members to ensure that cases of sexual violence are recognised as criminal acts and are handled accordingly, and to build the sensitivity and responsiveness of policing around such cases.
- Establish police posts and provide more frequent police patrols in those public areas identified as being prone to incidents of sexual violence, in order to strengthen police accessibility and visibility and better prevent and respond to incidents sexual violence.
- Provide the public, including victims of sexual violence, with a rapidly accessible link to police through the emergency PNTL phone line (#112), by ensuring that it is constantly attended, immediately answered and that a rapid response is mobilised, as required.

### The Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality (SEPI)

- Collaborate with civil society groups (including community leaders and organisations such as FOKUPERS, ALfeLa, Alola Foundation, JSPM, UN Women, Pradet, Rede Feto,) in order to raise public awareness about the issue of sexual violence through a coordinated, nationwide public advocacy campaign to change problematic norms and attitudes towards women that contribute to sexual violence.

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