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Press Release

Possession of Illegal and Unaccounted-for Weapons Continues

Problems with unregulated weapons in Timor-Leste have caused concern ever since the 2006 Crisis. The weapons in question were either lost during the Crisis or smuggled illegally into the country. There have already been intense efforts to recover and investigate the weapons lost during the Crisis. But some weapons from the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) have never been recovered. At the same time, the heads of the security institutions have stated that illegal weapons from Atambua in West Timor have entered Timor-Leste across the border and spread across the country.

Since presenting its 2011 investigative report into weapons lost during the Crisis to the Ministry of Defence and Security, FM has stated repeatedly that the Government must take the recommendations from the abovementioned investigative report seriously. This report also identified the personnel responsible for recovering the lost weapons. In addition, this report advocated disciplinary and criminal prosecution of specified personnel. So far the Government has not implemented these recommendations. Fortunately most weapons have been recovered since the 2006 Crisis, although the locations of some remain unknown. Minister of Defence and Security José Agostinho Sequeira stated that 10 weapons from the PNTL lost during the Crisis have never been recovered.

Simultaneously, the heads of the security institutions stated that illegal weapons from Atambua, West Timor, have crossed the border into Timor-Leste. With regards to this weapons trafficking, Border Patrol Unit (UPF) Commander PNTL Police Superintendent João Belo stated that the UPF received information that illegal weapons from Atambua are sold by ex-militiamen from West Timor who enter Timor-Leste in order to supply their basis needs. But there is little clarity about the current location of these illegal weapons or about who possesses them. In addition to automatic weapons from Atambua, other non-automatic weapons—commonly called

air rifles—also entered across the border in 2017, along with their ammunition. These weapons entered through illegal business activities on the frontier conducted by Timorese citizens and individuals from Atambua.

In addition to lost and illegal weapons, weapons currently possessed by security institutions—the PNTL and the FALINTIL-Defence Force of Timor-Leste (F-FDTL)—have continued to cause concern for the entire public. Stories have spread on social media about weapons from these two institutions falling into the hands of civilians and children, who may consider them toys. This indicates that these two institutions currently lack adequate management of their respective arsenals. FM is deeply concerned about the possibility of civilians accessing the security forces' weapons.

Unregulated weapons during the last few years in Timor-Leste have threatened, wounded, and killed people. They have also been used for killing protected animals. Many of these events occurred in Dili and in the districts of Ainaro, Cova Lima, Lautem, Manufahi, and Oecussi, from 2016 till the present. Some of these weapons have been identified as coming from members of the PNTL and F-FDTL, while many more remain unidentified. Where did they come from?

Recommendations

1. FM recommends that the PNTL and the F-FDTL use the intelligence services to continue searching for the weapons lost during the 2006 Crisis and for illegal weapons that have spread throughout the country.
2. FM recommends that the PNTL and the F-FDTL fix their internal mechanisms regarding the management and use of their arsenals.
3. The PNTL and the F-FDTL must take rigorous measures against members who use weapons unnecessarily and strengthen procedures around the use of weapons.

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