



## The Fireman Service of Timor-Leste

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## Introduction

The Fireman Corps of Timor-Leste is a state institution that was established in 1999 by a civil protection group and the Portuguese Fireman Corps with the purpose of serving the community in emergency situations. The majority of these firefighters work voluntarily.<sup>1</sup>

The real job of the Fireman Corps of Timor-Leste is to extinguish fires in every area, such as the house, land and forest, and providing emergency aid. The organization is also responsible for assisting victims of disease, transportation accidents, drowning, and natural disasters. Furthermore, pregnant individuals will receive the assistance of this organization. In addition to assisting these individuals on-site, the firemen will transport these people to a safe location and provide emergency goods.<sup>2</sup>

These firemen are responsible for assisting in both normal and emergency situations, but the main roles of the firefighters are extinguishing house fires and ensuring the safety and security of citizens whose house and goods were damaged.<sup>3</sup>

As members of a state institution and civil servants, the work of these firemen is based on the defined law of public civil servants, which states that they must work every week but not less than 24 hours, despite the fact that these firemen have worked over the maximum number of hours, as determined by law.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the firemen are subject to these rules, despite the different nature and relative danger of their work, when compare to that of other civil servants.

Apart from that, in the incident of a house fire, the community strongly questions the timing of the firefighter's service, which has at times arrived very late to the scene. In these instances, the community has needed support but has experienced severe delay in receiving the help of the fire brigade. Therefore, concerns are appearing often regarding the firefighters' service as a

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<sup>1</sup> The Fireman Anniversary for ten Years, Saturday. 08 May 2010. 09:55.  
<http://timorleste.gov.tl/?p=2899&lang=tp>

<sup>2</sup> Assistance, supplying water to community and support them by cutting wood or electricity cable that would threat for the communities.

<sup>3</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman's Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Working and off hours for every week, article 50, statute of civil servants. Law No.8/2008.

state institution and regarding the professionalism of this service as an institution. This simple report will investigate the supposed delay of these firefighters in arriving to the scene.

## **Methodology**

This methodology of this report includes analysis of relevant documents, interviews with members or commanders of the Fireman Corps, and an internal Security Sector Discussion (SSD) at Fundasaun Mahein (FM).

## **Legal Base and the Fireman Service of Timor-Leste**

### *1. Legal Base*

The fireman service is legally constituted by the Directorate of the National Civil Protection under the Secretary State of Security-SSS. According to government decree law No.31/2008, Article 42, the Directorate of the National Civil Protection (DNCP) is responsible for coordinating SSS' activities in the area of prevention, including protection from natural disaster and provision of assistance to victims of natural disaster. It is through this article that the firefighters can provide assistance and safety to those who have been affected by or have lost their property as a result of a fire or natural disaster.<sup>5</sup>

As cited above, the DNCP are responsible for developing the technical standard for the prevention of fires, inundation, earthquake, and natural disasters that pose a threat to communities and their goods. The DNCP is also responsible for coordinating these activities as well as consulting the Ministry of Public Construction in matters of construction and performing inspection of offices and public transportation from a security and rescue perspective.<sup>6</sup>

### *2. The Fireman Services of Timor-Leste*

As stated by law, the Fireman Corps is an element of the state agency that responsible for extinguishing fires.<sup>7</sup> The firefighters' responsibilities are to extinguish fires, provide assistance to

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<sup>5</sup> Article 42 of the National Directorate of Civil Protection (point1) Decree Law No. 31/2008, Organic Law of the Ministry of Defense and Security.

<sup>6</sup> Article 42 of the NDPCP (point2; b & d) Decree Law No. 31/2008, Organic Law of the Ministry of Defense and Security.

<sup>7</sup> Article 3, Statute Law of Public Function, Law No. 8/2004,

victims of house fires, rescue people drowning at sea or river.<sup>8</sup> The Fireman Corps will also support communities while there is any natural disaster is taking place. For example, in the case of the inundation that took place in Covalima district, the firefighters arrived to support the victims of natural disaster,<sup>9</sup> as well as rescue people whose house was on fire.<sup>10</sup>

In other countries, the firemen do not only face fire but many times support victims of traffic accidents, collapsed buildings, and natural disasters.<sup>11</sup>

The Fireman Corps is a part of the state that assumes responsibility to work for any natural disaster occurrence, particularly in the instance of house fires.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes members of the firefighters did not wear the uniforms and equipment for self-rescue even though they must to use such things in dangerous situations. In fact, they could not use such things because of insufficient, old, and relatively “unsophisticated” equipment, if compared to that of firemen in other countries. Even their responsibilities are facing the fire.<sup>13</sup>

In advanced countries, people who work for the firefighters become famous and beloved by kids at school, but how are they regarded in Timor-Leste? In Timor-Leste, students do not want to be firemen, because the insufficient salary would not fulfill for their necessities.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. *The Fireman Services*

The State Department of this nation serves its people through the functioning of the firefighters because this institution was established not to benefit for itself but to serve communities by creating a better condition. The communities wish for the firemen to serve their needs in a better, qualified, and professional manner, as part of their responsibility as the state’s server to the people.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Even the Firefighters is working on this area, yet has not got yet training for this.

<sup>9</sup> Inundation in Suai, three person dead, <http://www.timorhauniandoben.com/2013/06/inundasaun-ih-suai-nain-tolu-mate.html>

<sup>10</sup> Suai Market was on fire, South side of Timor-Leste, <http://noticias.sapo.tl/tetum/info/artigo/1371273.html>

<sup>11</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman’s Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

<sup>12</sup> [Department of the Firefigthers-ANNEAHIRA.COM](http://www.anneahira.com/dinas-pemadam-kebakaran.html), <http://www.anneahira.com/dinas-pemadam-kebakaran.html>

<sup>13</sup> Volunteer fire chief dies while battling Brazoria County house fire, <http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/story?section=news/local&id=9511846>

<sup>14</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman’s Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

<sup>15</sup> [Quality Service of the Firefigthers corp in Indonesia](http://cleavernotes.blogspot.com/) ; <http://cleavernotes.blogspot.com/>

According to the Fireman Corps, its services focus on extinguishing house fires and providing other assistance to communities, such as cutting trees or electricity cables that threaten the communities' houses. The firemen are also ready to support any national activities such as concerts or any international event.<sup>16</sup>

The Fireman Corps has served lots to people in this nation as mentioned on the above event, but the communities are still questioning over the firefighters' services, which are sometimes very late to the scene. For example, 9 houses were on fire in Bidau-Sengol because the firefighters were too late to extinguish the fire.<sup>17</sup> Timor-Telecom shop was on fire as well, and the firemen took an hour to get to the scene. As a result, some goods could not be saved, despite the fact that the distance of the fireman station to the scene is not far.<sup>18</sup>

Another case involved a market on fire in Covalima district recently, where the communities lost their goods. The firefighters arrived at the scene to extinguish the fire, but they could not extinguish it totally because they were lacking equipment and water, and the firefighters were only able to bring one fire engine. As a result, the firefighters did nothing because they had to get water at least 3 kilometers from the scene.<sup>19</sup>

## **Problems and Challenges Faced by the Fireman**

### **1. Organic Law, Plan for Uniforms and Salary**

The Fireman Corps is going to commemorate its 14<sup>th</sup> year, but lots of problems and challenge have faced this directorate thus far. The greatest problem lies in the fact that there has not yet an organic law and statute for this institution itself, staff's statute of the fireman. Drafts outlining plans for uniforms and salary<sup>20</sup> have been presented to the Council of Minister before 2010 for discussion but are still pending at the present.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman's Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

<sup>17</sup> "Nine houses were on Fire in Bidau", <http://www.timorhauniandoben.com/2012/09/ahi-haan-uma-9-ih-a-bidau.html>

<sup>18</sup> [www.cjitl.org](http://www.cjitl.org) Ahi Han Loza TT Bombeiros Mai Tarde ,  
[https://www.facebook.com/cjitl/posts/108819682520896?stream\\_ref=5](https://www.facebook.com/cjitl/posts/108819682520896?stream_ref=5)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.jndiario.com/2014/03/12/ahi-han-merkadu-covalima/>

<sup>20</sup> Policy of the Ministry of Defense and Security 2007 – 2012 Periods,  
<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2012/08/06/politika-ministeriu-defeza-no-siguransa-periodu-2007-2%80%93-2012/>

<sup>21</sup> Council of Ministers Legislative Plan Feb-July 2010, [http://laohamutuk.blogspot.com/2010\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://laohamutuk.blogspot.com/2010_02_01_archive.html)

FM believes that the government, especially the Secretary State of Security, will define the work of the Civil Protection Service, particularly that of the firefighters, as similar in service and performance to that of other civil servants.<sup>22</sup>

## *2. Infrastructure and Equipments*

Lots of the fireman members attended training abroad, but the equipment that they use here in Timor-Leste does not match the equipment used in their training. The majority of equipment that they possess is from UNTAET's periods, which are now useless.

Basic infrastructure and facilities for the Fireman Corps, whether at the national or district level, are at the very minimum. Recruitment for the fireman members and a fireman's station has been established in the districts, but there is no infrastructure to support them. Even worse, fireman's stations were established in the districts but with no supporting facilities for their services. These shortcomings include a lack of protection uniforms, fuel for vehicles, and multiple fire engines.<sup>23</sup>

If an incident (a house is on fire) is taking place, the firefighters will face problems because they do not have enough equipment. For example, these firefighters sometimes lack fire extinguishers, functioning water pumps and hoses, fuel assistance. Sometimes, firemen need support from communities in which the firemen feels uncomfortable.<sup>24</sup>

## *3. Human Resource and Training*

At present, the DNCP possesses 285 members, composed of 204 firefighters and 81 civil servants that are placed in the Fireman Corps in all territories Timor-Leste. The strategic plan for 2017 cited that the Fireman Corps will be placed in 13 districts, but given a lack of resources, the DNCP will first recruit to establish regional centers in Dili, Baucau, Bobonaro, Manufahi and Oe-cusse.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Policy of the Ministry of Defense and Security 2007 – 2012 Periods, <http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2012/08/06/politika-ministeriu-defeza-no-siguransa-periodu-2007-2%80%93-2012/>

<sup>23</sup> Covalima Market was on Fire, <http://www.jndiarior.com/2014/03/12/ahi-han-merkadu-covalima/>

<sup>24</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman's Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

<sup>25</sup> [Policy of Defense and Security Ministry for 2007 – 2012](#), Report of Mahein's Thought No. 02, 06 August 2012

Human resources training and basic training for the Fireman Corps are provided by countries such as Portugal, Malaysia, Brazil and Singapore. Sometimes, the Fireman Corps continue their training in these countries. However, Timor-Leste lacks some of the facilities of these countries, so the fireman faces the challenge of applying their training and experience back home.<sup>26</sup>

On the other side, because the facilities in Timor-Leste cannot support many of the tasks learned in their training, the firemen mostly address basic needs. What they are doing right now is assistance to roadway accidents and handling of house fires.

#### *4. Bureaucracy Challenge*

Bureaucracy in budget process has presented problems for the firefighters' service. It is difficult to respond in an emergency manner because of the delay of assistance and lack of funds. Even worse is that when the assistance arrives, the rescue staff were gone.

Other problem is the government invests on physical development but it was not relevant with the development of civil protection which has important role to protect offices that has been written on the government decree law No. 2/2008.<sup>27</sup> The other responsibilities of DNCP are to inspect housing construction, coordinate with the Ministry of Public Construction, make surveys regarding construction, and inspect public transportation.<sup>28</sup>

#### *5. Problem of the Quality Services*

The problems and challenge faced by the firefighters are really complicated; however, they are sincere and still firmly to accept the reality, because they feel the services they provide represent a vocation for them. This vocation has made them ready to face anytime to face the fire, so they continue hard train with strong spirit.

Members of the firefighters have also acquired training and knowledge through new technology on the subject of extinguishing fire, even though they do not have enough equipment. The government, particularly the Fireman Corps, faces a lack of equipments and infrastructure.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman's Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014

<sup>27</sup> Policy of the Ministry of Defense and Security 2007 – 2012 Periods, <http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2012/08/06/politika-ministeriu-defeza-no-siguransa-periodu-2007-2%80%93-2012/>

<sup>28</sup> National Directorate of Civil Protection, article 42 (g, h), Government Decree Law No. 31/2008

<sup>29</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman's Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.



As the public knows, state servants, including firemen, need good conditions in order to successfully do their jobs. It is quite hard to successfully provide services if the necessary facilities, such infrastructure and equipment, are insufficient. As such, misunderstanding and dissatisfaction will appear regarding this public service. One sensitive issue between the government and the community is the quality of public services provided by the government, especially the firemen. In light of global competition, the state faces great challenges in providing quality public services and effectively addressing the needs and concerns of communities.

In light of the issues above, the government as well as the firefighters should be held accountable for the successes and failures they experience in providing public services to the people of East Timor.

The communities considered that the government's efforts through the firefighters corps are still far from satisfaction, in terms of the quality of services and the timeliness of firefighters in extinguishing fires.

### **What should the State do about these concerns?**

#### *1. National Strategic Plan of the Secretary State of Security-SSS*

According to the National Development Strategic Plan of the Internal Security 2030, the Secretary State of Security is now in the preparation phase and will prioritize to resolve problems of law, decree law, organic law for the national directorate at SSS. Existing problems such as human resources, basic training, infrastructure (offices), maintenance, and logistics such as firefighting should be resolved on this first phase.<sup>30</sup>

According to the views of FM, there were some problems that the government through the Secretary State of Security, particularly the Directorate for the National Civil Protection and the Fireman Corps has not resolved yet. According to the existing plan, the government (SSS) is in middle of the first phase; however some priorities that were cited on the aforementioned planning phase are going slowly. Some examples include the organic law as well as a plan for uniforms, salary, infrastructure, and equipment for the firefighters.

#### *2. Emergency call 115*

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<sup>30</sup> Internal Security Strategic Plan of 2030, Buletin of Security, edition No. 4, December 2013

To respond to the service problems of the firefighters, the government, through the National Directorate of Civil Protection, has launched an emergency call (115), in order to properly facilitate the National Cooperation and Operational Center and to serve people in need of support.<sup>31</sup>

To resolve some concerns from the communities, the government has launched an emergency call (115) for supporting. However, the majority of the communities did not save this emergency number so in the event of a house fire, the communities will do nothing. Yet, sometimes some people saved this number and prank call the firemen. As a result, sometimes real fires and real emergencies go unaddressed; because the firemen suspect that the caller is lying.

In addition, poor traffic circulation prevents the firemen from reaching the scene quickly, and sometimes the firemen receive the information too late.

### *3. Establishment of the Fireman Corps in the Districts.*

To be closer to the communities, the Fireman Corps, through the National Directorate of Civil Protection, has made a plan to establish posts for firemen to work throughout Timor-Leste. Currently, the Fireman Corps has established stations in ten (10) districts, leaving only three (3) districts without an established station. However, everything depends on the budget allocated to the institution. The DNCP is attempting to establish more offices in all districts.<sup>32</sup>

At first, the Fireman Corps was only established in the three (3) districts of Dili, Baucau and Aileu (districts), and the corps was supported by Portuguese firemen. After independence, the government through DNCP established stations in Oe-cusse Island, Manufahi, Covalima, Maliana, Viqueque and Lautem districts and is now in the process of recruiting. Within the year, it is possible that a fireman station will be established in every territory of Timor-Leste. This would include stations in Ermera and Manatuto districts and finally in Liquica district.

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<sup>31</sup> DNCP launches new emergency call 115, <http://www.thediliweekly.com/tl/35-jornalen/development/2099-new-emergency-hotline-115-launched>

<sup>32</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman's Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

The total number of fireman members at the Dili station is around 69. Baucau has only 30 members, Oe-cusse has 30 members, and other districts, such as Aileu, have around 22 members.<sup>33</sup>

The government, through the DNCP, has made plans to establish two more support stations in Dili in order to better serve people in need of emergency assistances. These two fireman supporting stations will be established in East Dili-Comoro and West Dili-Becora with the purpose of responding to emergency situations. These stations are being established in light of traffic movement in Dili, which has recently been increasing and affecting the ability of the firemen to provide service and assistance. However, such a plan depends on the budgeting and land necessary to build these two stations. The Dili firefighters should work for Atauro sub-district because it also belongs to Dili operational zone.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman's Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

<sup>34</sup> The Fireman wishes to establish post in the strategic point, in City in order to provide assistances as soon as possible. <http://noticias.sapo.tl/tetum/info/artigo/1147876.html>

## **Conclusion**

The Fireman Corps of East Timor was established by a volunteer civil protection team and the firemen of Portugal in 1999, with the purpose supporting and providing assistance to communities in emergency situations.

After independence, the Fireman Corps became a state institution, and its structures were set up under the Secretary State of Security and the National Directorate of Civil Protection that work to extinguish house and forest fires, provide emergency assistance, rescue people at sea, and support communities in the event of any natural disaster.

Currently, the Fireman Corps has established its post in every district but still lacks basic infrastructure to mobilize these facilities, such as tables, chairs, cupboards, and computers. Some of the firefighters' stations in the districts really lack of facilities, and this affects their ability to effectively serve people. Some examples of these shortages are fire extinguishers as well as funding for equipment and vehicle maintenance.

In response to any natural disaster, the Fireman Corps' responsibility is to work for civil protection and emergency. Given the nature of the position, of course, the fireman service is quite different than other civil services, yet the government, particularly the Secretary State of Security and Public Administration Function, generalizes their service as similar as others and does not distinguish them as different.

There are lots of challenges and problems facing the Fireman Corps in doing its daily job, such as lack of facilities, old equipments, and maintenance issues.

The overarching problem is that, since its beginning, the Fireman Corps has not possessed the organic law and statute for the firefighters itself. Currently, its members, as well as the nature of uniforms and salary, are dictated by the government decree law No, 31/2008. According to research, proposals for a distinct law are still kept at the National Directorate of Civil Protection, and these proposed changes will be discussed with the Fireman Corps.

In terms of facilities, the firefighters have been supported by UNMIT mission and UNDP thus far, in order to facilitate services of the civil protection.

FM has found that the DNCP has held lots of training abroad but that the Timorese government itself did not prepare sufficient facilities for these firemen. As a result, it is quite hard to apply the experience and training these firemen received abroad. Most firefighters lack the modern

equipment and protective uniforms necessary for their work. At the national station, there are only 7 firemen of the 69 members that existed in Dili.<sup>35</sup>

### **Recommendation**

Regarding the priority, necessities, and concerns of the communities pertaining to the firefighters' service, FM recommends the following:

1. The Secretary State of Security, through the National Directorate of Civil Protection (DNCP), should accelerate, as soon as possible, drafts of the organic law as well as the plan for uniforms and salary for the Fireman Corps based on the strategic plan of SSS, in order to valorize and motivate the Fireman Corps.
2. Allocate funds, create a maintenance system for equipments, and establish stations for firemen at regional or district levels, in order to effectively serve the communities.

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<sup>35</sup> Interviewed with the Dili Fireman's Commander, Cosme Camelo on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

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