



## Drug-Trafficking: Timor-Leste as a Transit Route

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*Photo Timor Agora Blogspot*

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## Introduction

Transnational organized crime has detrimental affects for people's lives in the countries where its networks operate. Timor-Leste is a nation threatened by transnational organized crime.<sup>1</sup> The threat of drug-trafficking has become particularly serious in the last few years and may increase further.<sup>2</sup>

Timor-Leste's geographic context, coupled with the inadequacy of its border controls, makes it an appealing route for drug-traffickers. Consequently, Timor-Leste continues to struggle to address the trafficking of stupefying and psychotropic substances.<sup>3</sup>

This report discusses the risk that Timor-Leste will functioning as a transit route for drug traffickers seeking to enter neighbouring countries. It also identifies critical areas for drugs as well as efforts to combat drug trafficking and the difficulties involved. Finally, the report offers recommendations about how to address these challenges.

## Methodology

This report's analysis is based on monitoring by Fundasaun Mahein (FM) about narcotics, as well as information from official government publications and reports by international organizations. The report was concluded via FM's method of *Security Sector Discussion* (SSD). SSD involves FM researchers analysing the relevant materials and producing recommendations.

## Timor-Leste as a Transit Nation

The *National Assessment of the Risk of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing* from the National Commission for the Implementation of Measures against Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing (CNCBC) in 2016 concluded that drug trade within Timor-Leste was not a serious threat. It pointed out that domestic market for narcotics remained relatively small (mostly limited to methamphetamines). Instead, Timor-Leste has the danger of being a transit route to Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

Drugs enter (via Singapore and other countries in Southeast Asia) across Timor-Leste's long coastline or its weakly controlled airport and land border. Most drug trafficking involves Indonesian citizens along with their Timorese accomplices. These criminals use

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<sup>1</sup> Konseitu Estratejiku Defeza and Seguransa Nasional Timor-Leste, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Fundasaun Mahein (14 May 2015), Drogra Threat Seriu ba Timor-Leste?

<sup>3</sup> Projetu ba proposed law n.º 2/2017, de 25 de Aprova lei kona-ba illegal trafficking and consumption of drugs

<sup>4</sup> National Assessments of the Threats and Risks of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing. 7 October 2016.



Timor-Leste as a transit route for entering Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

In 2012 three foreign nationals (from Africa, Australia and New Zealand) were detained in Timor-Leste when they attempted to bring seven kilograms of cocaine into the country. These drugs came from Africa via India and Singapore, and their intended destination was Indonesia. The suspects were handed over to the Indonesian authorities for investigation in accordance with an agreement that Timor-Leste and Indonesia previously signed.<sup>6</sup>

The 2017 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (INCSR) by the USA State Department stated that Timor-Leste remains a small market for illegal drugs and international trafficking networks instead exploit Timor-Leste as a transit route. The Government of Timor-Leste and international observers believe that drug traffickers benefit from Timor-Leste's long border and inadequate security capabilities to transport illegal drugs to their clients in Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries in the region. According to authorities in Timor-Leste, the majority of drugs trafficked in Timor-Leste are methamphetamines. Furthermore, according to the available data, a small amount of organic drug production occurs in Timor-Leste. This includes the production of methamphetamines, pseudoephedrine, and ephedrine from precursor chemical available at pharmacies in Dili. There is no limit on how much of these chemicals someone can purchase, and there are no requirements when they are purchased.<sup>7</sup>

### **Critical Routes for Drug Trafficking**

In a 2010 report, FM identified how organized crime groups enter and exit Timor-Leste by air, land, and sea. Weaknesses in the security authorities stemming from the lack of equipment for detecting contraband mean that organized crime groups perceive easy methods of infiltrating the country. FM recommended that Indonesia and Timor-Leste act jointly to conduct rigorous border management.<sup>8</sup>

Reports by local media in Indonesia have provoked discussion in Timor-Leste during the last five years due to accusations that Timor-Leste has become a transit route for drug trafficking networks seeking to reach Indonesia via the land border with Timor-Leste.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Timor-Leste: National Assessment of the Risks of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing. 7 October 2016

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> US State Department. *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (INCSR) Volume I, March 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Fundasaun Mahein (27 January 2017). Organized Crime Operations on the Border between Timor-Leste and Indonesia.

<sup>9</sup> Fundasaun Mahein (27 January 2017). Organized Crime Operations on the International Border between Timor-Leste and Indonesia.



### 1. Land border

A 2016 report by the General Prosecutor of the Republic stated that many drugs enter Timor-Leste across the land frontier with Indonesia. In 2014, one man involved in an international drug trafficking network named Iksan Darmawan brought 1,595 Kg of crystal meth with a minimum value of \$478,500.00 hidden in a shower pipe. Police arrested him in Dili and in 2015 the Dili Court condemned him to ten years in prison. The drug trafficking syndicate chose to cross the land frontier due to the weakness of the border controls.<sup>10</sup>

### 2. Airport

In 2014 the police arrested two female Indonesian citizens named Sriyanti and Nuryati at President Nicolau Lobato Airport. The suspects were carrying 1,192 kg of crystal meth with a minimum value of USD \$356,100.00 intended for Denpasar, Indonesia. Fortunately, the police arrested these two individuals and in 2015 the Dili court condemned them to 15 years and 13 years 6 months in prison respectively. Importantly, planes that stop in Singapore while taking passengers to Timor-Leste or other countries in Asia normally do not undergo rigorous inspection in Singapore. Therefore, some drug traffickers take advantage of this situation to pass through Singapore while going to Timor-Leste, where they know control system also remains vulnerable.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Port

It is well known that on 23 January 2018 the police confiscated nine containers full of contraband at the Dili Port. The materials inside these containers were 162 tons of precursor chemicals for the production of PCC (*Paracetamol, Caffeine and Corrosprodol*). These substances were destined for Indonesia. One Timorese citizen and two Indonesian citizens were arrested and underwent their first interrogation at the Dili District Court. Alarmingly, the Indonesian suspect has escaped from national territory. This case is still being investigated.<sup>12</sup>

## **Efforts to Combat Drug Trafficking**

The Government of Timor-Leste is trying to improve its anti-narcotics efforts but faces serious challenges. Furthermore, the available data is insufficient to measure the extent

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<sup>10</sup> 2015 Annual Information General Prosecutor of the Republic to National Parliament. April 2016.

<sup>11</sup> 2015 Annual Information General Prosecutor Republikan ba National Parliament. April 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Fundasaun Mahein (31 January 2018). Organized Crime Expands its Network in Timor-Leste.



of drug trafficking in the country.<sup>13</sup>

Timorese and Indonesian authorities have made public statements about improving bilateral cooperation against drug trafficking. However, a key challenge is that the total amount of drug trafficking in Timor-Leste remains unclear. Some observers expressed concern that this problem is deeper than initially thought. Leaders in Timor-Leste—from the Prime Minister to high-ranking police officials—have emphasized the need to increase anti-drug trafficking efforts. The lack of prosecutors and police personnel with experience and training around this issue represents a serious obstacle to Timor-Leste's anti-narcotics efforts. Furthermore, Timor-Leste's capacity to analyse the organizational structures and operations of drug-trafficking syndicates remain inadequate. The Customs authority likewise lacks the basic capacity to combat drug-trafficking, as Customs personnel have received minimal training about how to detect drugs. Furthermore, there is a lack of capacity in other areas such as maritime counter-trafficking operations and X-ray machines.<sup>14</sup>

The Border Patrol Unit (UPF) of the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) generally recognizes the weaknesses in border control, which largely stem from the insufficiency of resources and personnel placed on the border. These shortfalls include the lack of facilities and basic equipment to conduct their duties. Many police agents at the border lack training to conduct adequate searches for drugs and other illegal materials. Furthermore, there is no laboratory to conduct testing, meaning that often tests must be conducted in Indonesia according to agreements with the Government of Indonesia.<sup>15</sup>

The case of the nine containers with PCC ingredients confiscated by the police at the Dili Port on 23 January 2018 highlights the difficulties that Timor-Leste faces. Timor-Leste has no laboratory to conduct tests on these substances. Instead, such tests are conducted in Indonesia according to an agreement between the PNTL and Indonesia's *Badan Narkotika Nasional* (BNN). Especially in this case and in the ongoing investigative process, the shortfalls in Timor-Leste's capacity to address this problem have become clear. However, this trial also offers an opportunity to discover more facts about the involvement of individuals involved in this issue. These nine containers were brought into Timor-Leste with the intention of subsequently taking them to Indonesia. However, the transnational organized crime group used some local business as a means of facilitating their entry into Timor-Leste. Such practices are typical of organized crime groups.<sup>16</sup>

In 2017, Timor-Leste passed a law about combating drug trafficking and consumption.

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<sup>13</sup> US State Department. *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (INCSR) Volume I, Marc 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> US State Department. *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (INCSR) Volume I, March 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Fundasaun Mahein (31 January 2018). Organized Crime Expands its Networks in Timor-Leste. Available here: <http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MNL-129-PDF.pdf>



This law was meant to implement regulations related to addressing narcotics smuggling and coordinating national institutions in the fight against drug-trafficking. Although surveys about the consumption of illegal drugs in Timor-Leste have been conducted, Timorese authorities state that drug use in Timor-Leste remains minimal. Specialists believe that the majority of narcotics in Timor-Leste are intended to be consumed in Indonesia, once they have crossed the land border. Furthermore, there is currently no treatment and rehabilitation program for drug users in Timor-Leste.

### **Recommendations**

Despite the many difficulties identified in this report, Timor-Leste has begun efforts to combat drug-trafficking. The Government must pay close attention to strengthen the control systems, particularly with regards to improving equipment and human resources, in order to discourage organized crime. The main focus should be on creating an integrated service covering the land border, the Dili Port, and the airport.



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