



**Fundasaun Mahein (FM), 26 February 2021**

## **Press Release**

### **PNTL: Policing During The COVID-19 Pandemic**

In December 2019, the Government of China announced that a new virus had emerged which was given the name SARS-CoV-2. This was confirmed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), which laid out strategies for the prevention and control of Covid-19, the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2. The global response to this disease has included social distancing, self-quarantine, 'lockdown' and limiting public activities.

In response to the pandemic, the Timor-Leste Government rapidly developed measures involving governmental institutions, civil society and assistance from international agencies. A key part of the response was the declaration of a State of Emergency after Timor-Leste registered its first case of COVID-19 on 21 March 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major public health crisis which threatens to create a public calamity. PNTL's mission is to defend democratic rule, guarantee citizens' security and wellbeing, and protect citizens rights according to the terms established in the National Constitution and Laws.<sup>1</sup> PNTL therefore plays an important role in implementing COVID-19 prevention measures and rules.

FM's monitoring since the declaration of the first State of Emergency has focused on PNTL's response to the COVID-19 situation. The Commander-General of PNTL directed Municipal Commands to implement the State of Emergency according to the Law. PNTL has carried out various functions, including socialisation of COVID-19 prevention measures and rules, guarding quarantine and isolation facilities, guarding entry and exit points, patrols in coastal, sea and land border areas as well as national and municipal roads, and providing security to the Government related to the COVID-19 response activities.

In addition to its specific mission to respond to COVID-19, PNTL also continues to maintain its mission and competencies attributed to it under PNTL's Organic Law. PNTL continues to adopt the community policing philosophy as a core element of its strategy, including the doctrine of VIP (visibility, involvement and professionalism) in all its actions related to maintaining public order and peace.

Policing operations during COVID-19 have encountered several challenges. This includes the 'doubling' of PNTL's work, as PNTL must carry out pandemic response functions in addition to its normal duties.

Another issue relates to the use of force in violation of standard procedure. As noted by the Ombudsman for Human Rights (PDHJ) and Human Rights Defender's Network

---

<sup>1</sup> N.º 1, Article 1 Decree Law N.º 9/2009, 18 February, PNTL Organic Law

(RDDU) in their reports on the State of Emergency, there have several incidents involving PNTL members violating human rights.

Looking at the current reality, the number of positive COVID-19 cases continues to increase, and there is already confirmed local transmission. Thus, the State of Emergency is likely to continue. Therefore, FM encourages PNTL to learn from its actions and its mistakes, including following the community policing and VIP approaches. Such a model of policing which promotes mutual partnership between police and communities has been very successful for PNTL during the pandemic situation.

## **Recommendation**

Although imperfect, the response of PNTL members during the pandemic situation has shown positive signs, especially promoting dialogue rather than using unnecessary force.

Therefore, FM recommends that PNTL continues to promote community policing and VIP while adjusting to the new reality of policing during the pandemic situation.

For further information on this issue, please contact:

### **João Almeida**

Acting Director

Email: [almeidamahein@gmail.com](mailto:almeidamahein@gmail.com)

Telemovel: (+670) 7756 1184

Website: [www.fundasaunmahein.org](http://www.fundasaunmahein.org)