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Press Release

Policy on PNTL Programming Urgently Needed to Address Human Resource, Infrastructure and Equipment Gaps

The National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) is a vital institution tasked with maintaining law and order across the country. This report assesses the current state of PNTL organisation and operations, focusing on key areas such as human resources, infrastructure and equipment.

In order to respond to the systemic challenges identified in this research comprehensively and sustainably, FM believes that **the Timor-Leste Government must take immediate steps to develop a PNTL Programming Policy**. Such a policy should be developed through intensive research into current and future policing needs, which would then be used to design clear targets for investment and development over the short-, medium- and long-term. This policy would serve as a guide for ongoing reforms and investments aimed at building PNTL's capacity so that the institution can respond to policing and security challenges as they develop. The policy would ensure that reforms and investments are driven by institutional needs rather than short term goals of individuals. It would also ensure continuity between changes of government, thereby guaranteeing the sustainability of capacity development efforts.

Regarding human resources, **many police posts are facing significant understaffing, especially at the municipal and sub-municipal levels**. Furthermore, PNTL's recruitment of new officers has not kept pace with the expanding demands of policing in Timor-Leste. The lack of regular recruitment means that PNTL personnel often reach old age before being promoted to senior positions within major divisions. The research also revealed that the training programs currently available to PNTL officers are sporadic and insufficient. These programs do not adequately address the evolving challenges officers face, such as crisis management, leadership development or community engagement.

Regarding police infrastructure, the research revealed a major disparity between urban and rural areas. While urban centres like Dili benefit from better facilities, **many rural police stations are operating with outdated and inadequate infrastructure**. This disparity is particularly evident in detention facilities, such as those in Laulara, Aileu municipality, which are poorly maintained and pose both security risks and operational challenges. There is an urgent need to rehabilitate these facilities to ensure that police operations can be carried out safely and efficiently. Furthermore, despite the capital city police building being operational for 24 years, no modifications have been made to address changing operational needs. Currently, the construction and equipment procurement are handled by separate companies, which creates fragmented project coordination.

Equipment shortages are another critical issue affecting PNTL's performance. Essential tools such as radios, vehicles and protective gear are either outdated or in limited supply. There are significant delays in equipment maintenance, largely due to an overly centralized and bureaucratic maintenance system that creates inefficiencies in repair and replacement processes.

Discipline and accountability within PNTL have also been inconsistent, with enforcement of disciplinary measures varying significantly across different posts. This inconsistency not only undermines officer morale but also impacts professionalism within the force. The research highlighted that a more transparent and consistent disciplinary framework is needed to maintain standards and promote accountability and responsibility among officers.

Moreover, **officers approaching retirement face significant challenges due to a lack of adequate support.** Many of them experience uncertainty about their future, which impacts their morale as they near the end of their service. There is a need for programs that offer financial planning, recognition of service and reintegration support to ensure that retired officers can transition with dignity and maintain their well-being after their service ends.

In addition to these operational challenges, **the research also identified systemic gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment** within PNTL as a critical issue that needs urgent attention. Female officers often face discrimination in recruitment, promotions, and daily interactions, which limits their opportunities and professional development. Moreover, reports of sexual harassment within the force are frequently underreported and inadequately addressed. Tackling these issues will require comprehensive gender-sensitive reforms, including the implementation of clear policies, training programs on gender equality and harassment prevention, and stronger mechanisms for reporting and addressing complaints.

Finally, FM's research findings indicate an urgent need to **depoliticize governance and personnel management processes within PNTL** – including recruitment, unit organization and retirement. Based on our observations during this and prior research, FM believes that politicization within the policing and justice institutions severely undermines their professionalism and credibility. The involvement of political entities in overseeing personnel decisions has created a system vulnerable to favoritism and personalized decision making, where officers' careers are subject to undue political influence. All subjects interviewed during this research agreed that personnel management processes must prioritize merit and competence over political affiliations or historical group ties, such as those to veterans or certain political movements. Depoliticizing these key processes is essential to restoring trust in the institution, ensuring internal cohesion, and enabling PNTL to operate as a truly independent and effective law enforcement agency.

To address the specific operational and developmental challenges identified through this research, FM proposes the following reforms and investments:

- Human Resources
 - Implement regular recruitment cycles to address staffing shortages, with a focus on gender balance and retaining experienced staff. Recruitment should target individuals of productive age who can assume leadership roles such as department heads, unit commanders and municipal commanders.

- Establish continuous, targeted training initiatives to enhance leadership, crisis response and human rights skills.
- Infrastructure
 - Prioritize the renovation of outdated facilities, especially in rural areas, to ensure safe and efficient working conditions. Police building construction should include an integrated package incorporating essential equipment such as furniture, computers, printers and internet connectivity.
 - Streamline procurement processes to ensure coherent project management e.g. by eliminating the use of separate companies for construction and equipment procurement.
 - Empower municipal commands to manage basic maintenance needs to reduce delays and operational disruptions.
- Equipment
 - Invest in modern communications systems, expand the vehicle fleet and provide adequate protective equipment to enhance officer safety and operational readiness.
 - Simplify equipment maintenance and replacement procedures to improve resource availability.
- Discipline and Accountability
 - Develop a transparent disciplinary system to ensure justice and consistency, strengthen professionalism and increase public confidence in PNTL.
- Retirement Support
 - Establish a structured program for financial planning, recognition and reintegration to ensure a dignified transition for retired officers.

By implementing these recommendations, FM believes that PNTL will be better positioned to enhance its capabilities, professionalism and relationship with the public, ultimately strengthening its ability to ensure the safety and security of Timor-Leste and all its citizens.