

# In Asia: Weekly Insight and Features from Asia

## The Asia Foundation

### NOTES FROM THE FIELD

## New Texts Boost Timor-Leste's Legal Capacity

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By Erik Jensen and Sam Saunders

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Justin Bieber may not have visited Asia's newest state, Timor-Leste, yet, but as six Stanford law students found out earlier this year, his popularity has preceded him at the National University of Timor-Leste (UNTL). The Stanford students were visiting UNTL with the **Timor-Leste Legal Education Project (TLLEP)**, a partnership among The Asia Foundation, UNTL, and Stanford Law School. Mr. Bieber's popularity was a light-hearted topic in a discussion between UNTL law students and Stanford Law students about legal education in Timor-Leste. The Stanford Law students solicited feedback from UNTL students about classroom instruction, language challenges, job prospects, and textbook needs.



Stanford law students and TLLEP members Jackie Iwata (second from left) and Hamida Owusu (left) conduct a focus group with UNTL law students on legal education in Timor-Leste. Photo/Sam Saunders

Similar discussions that have taken place over the last five years, with representatives from Timor's Court of Appeals, the Prosecutor General and Public Defender offices, the Parliament, the Ministry of Justice, private lawyers, and local NGOs informed the development of a just-launched publication from TLLEP: a nine-part series (free for download on [TLLEP's website](#)), entitled *Introduction to the Laws of Timor-Leste*. The series covers topics such as criminal law, constitutional rights, family law, inheritance law, government contracts, petroleum extraction, and the petroleum fund law, as well as legal history and the rule of law in Timor-Leste.

The need for domestic legal capacity in Timor-Leste has never been greater. An 11-year-old island nation of 1.2 million people, Timor-Leste boasts a functioning democracy and significant oil and gas reserves. Beautiful beaches, diving, and rugged mountainous terrain dazzle tourists. No major incidents of violence have occurred since rebel-led attacks on the president and prime minister in 2008, and the capital city of Dili now has a multi-story mall and movie theater. Yet extreme poverty is visible immediately adjacent the mall, and only

increases as one travels outside Dili, where subsistence living under the poverty line is the norm. In the legal sector, capacity for official law enforcement, prosecution, defense, and adjudication of criminal cases quickly dissipates outside Dili. Even less capacity exists for civil litigation and contracting.

By producing Timor-specific texts for law students, teachers, lawyers, officials, and NGOs, TLLEP supports the development of Timor-Leste's domestic legal capacity. TLLEP publications are written in clear and concise prose using hypothetical legal situations, discussion questions, and current events, with the aim to make texts accessible to the largest possible audience. The texts are authored by Stanford law students and reviewed by Stanford faculty, civil law experts, UNTL faculty, and Timorese legal professionals. In many areas of law, TLLEP's texts are the only available Timor-specific materials.

UNTL, as the leading academic institution in Timor-Leste, is a logical hub in these urgently needed capacity-building efforts. Enrollment in UNTL's law school has rapidly increased with demand, but slots are limited by faculty capacity and resources. Many Timorese seek education in non-accredited law schools or in Indonesia, graduating with little understanding of Timor law or the Portuguese language in which the Timorese legal system primarily operates. These students routinely fail the entrance exam for the mandatory certification courses at the Judiciary Training Centre.

TLLEP's texts are an important resource for these students. In addition to the new introductory series, TLLEP has produced books on professional responsibility, constitutional rights, and contracts (all available at <http://tllep.stanford.edu/>). TLLEP has plans to complete a new textbook in early 2014 entitled *An Introduction to Criminal Law in Timor-Leste*. Most texts are available in Tetum, Portuguese, and English.

As the Timorese who use TLLEP's texts attest, programs aimed at supporting and increasing Timor-Leste's legal capacity are a welcome aid to the new nation whose future remains uncertain. Within the broader national imperative in capacity building, TLLEP aims to help build the legal capacity to maintain peace and orderly governance, stimulate economic development, and deliver quality of life improvements to its citizens. TLLEP is helping to build and support legal education at UNTL and throughout Timor one textbook at a time.

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