

The role of journalists in disseminating *Chega!*

Pat Walsh, STP-CAVR, 22 May 07

1. In March last year, our former President Xanana Gusmao said that journalists have an important role to play in the dissemination of *Chega!*. This was reported in STL on 30 March 2006. The President urged journalists to help the Secretariat to make the report and its contents known to the Timorese community. In carrying out that service, he also urged journalists to be professional and accurate in their reporting of *Chega!*
2. The purpose of our gathering today is to work out together how journalists can fulfil the request made to them by President Gusmao last year and how to comply with that request as well as possible in the national interest.
3. We can work out some practical ideas together. Jaimito and his socialisation team have lots of good ideas. What follows are some general thoughts from my side.
4. *Chega!* has hardly been reported in the media. It is a story or stories waiting to be told, a goldmine for good journalists. This silence on the part of the media was understandable 12 months ago but I am surprised that journalists continue to ignore *Chega!* Let me give some examples. Last Saturday, e.g., STL published a profile of Jose Ramos-Horta on its back page. The profile made the usual references to the Nobel Prize etc and informed the reader a little bit about Ramos-Horta's family. But it ignored the fact that the most authoritative Timorese opinion about Horta's contribution to this country is to be found in *Chega!* Another example. Last week President Xanana handed out medals to the families of heroes of Timor who died in the bush giving their lives for Timor's freedom. They are rightly honoured. But the occasion was also a good opportunity for journalists to remind the Timorese community that many others contributed to Timor's freedom, in the diaspora and particularly international civil society whose role *Chega!* recommends should be honoured by the Timorese government. *Chega!*, e.g., has a section on the contribution of Indonesian NGOs to self-determination. That would make a good article in the Timorese media. The CAVR video *Dalan ba Dame* includes several statements by Alfredo Reinado about his experience as a child TBO during the war with Indonesia. As far as I know, no journalists have asked to see his testimony to report it in the media. So I think we should ask ourselves why journalists are not using *Chega!* or writing articles based on *Chega!*
5. Second, *Chega!* needs to be disseminated much more. We have distributed copies and run seminars on *Chega!* in all districts but this was only a beginning. People are not familiar with its contents. I have met Government Ministers, University Lecturers, senior priests, members of the UN, members of Parliament and senior NGOs who all admit they have not seen or read *Chega!* As professional communicators, you can help with this further dissemination, including by simplifying the contents of *Chega!* and making them accessible to ordinary people.

6. Third, I want to stress that, despite the controversy surrounding its original presentation, *Chega!* is not a controversial document which will create problems for you if you start reporting it. Our new President, himself a former journalist, wants people to study it. Last year he said this about *Chega!*: *'The extensive CAVR report is an encyclopedia of our history, both rich in teachings and suffering. We must utilise its great teachings to better understand today's crisis and to help prevent future crises'*. And even if you did create some controversy, President Horta would understand. He was exiled from Timor to Mozambique when he was 18 for making true, but critical, statements about the Government of the day in Timor. Who do you model yourselves on? Is there a good Timorese journalist who you want to be like or a good foreign journalist (an Adelino Gomes, a Jill Jolliffe...)?

7. *Chega!* recommends certain measures to guarantee basic freedoms in Timor-Leste: *'menjamin hak-hak dasar'*. *Chega!* believes that journalists have a significant responsibility to safeguard these basic freedoms. It suggests that an annual award be established to honour journalists who have made a special contribution to the truth and the protection of basic freedoms over the previous 12 months. It makes the following recommendation:
'Media memprakarsai sebuah penghargaan yang diberikan setiap tahun untuk jurnalisme investigatif yang dibuat oleh jurnalis Timor-Leste dan bahwa penghargaan ini diberikan untuk memperingati para jurnalis yang kehilangan nyawa mereka di Timor-Leste dalam upaya menggali kebenaran selama periode 1974-1999'. (3.5.4) I suggest that a very useful piece of investigative journalism would be to research and report on why Parliament has not addressed *Chega!*

8. Lastly, it would be very helpful to learn what each individual parliamentary candidate thinks about *Chega!* and plans to do about it in the new parliament. We have handed out some possible questions to help you interview politicians. This needs to be coordinated. But I suggest that a practical goal should be to see that each candidate is interviewed and, whether or not the interview is published, it is provided to Jaimito and his team to place in a dossier for reference once Parliament resumes. An alternative would be for STP-CAVR to survey each parliamentary candidate regarding *Chega!* and to make the results known to the media.

Thank you.