



## Timor court decision could promote culture of impunity: Opposition

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Updated February 26, 2009 11:11:09

East Timor's President Jose Ramos-Horta was in New York recently asking the United Nations Security Council to extend its mission in the fledgling nation.

The U-N will make that decision today but it will do so amid a cloud of doubt surrounding the legitimacy of its police presence in the troubled nation. A 1,500-strong international police force was given authority over East Timor's internal security force in 2006, after tensions between the police and military led to deadly violence. However, a recent decision by East Timor's highest court has found the the agreement between the East Timorese government and the United Nations Police non-binding and unconstitutional. East Timor's Opposition says the court's decision is alarming, and could lead to a culture of impunity within the fledgling police force.

*Presenter: Stephanie March*

*Speaker: Bu Wilson, East Timor researcher from the Australian National University*

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MARCH: In East Timor it's being called the case of the fake policeman.

An East Timorese police officer who refused to comply with a suspension order from the United Nations Police Commander and went back to work, was accused and convicted of a false identity crime - for impersonating a cop.

East Timor's court of appeal recently overturned that decision, saying the UN police commander was not in a position to suspend the officer, as it found an agreement between the government and UN was not constitutional, casting doubt over exactly who, is the fake policeman.

East Timor researcher from the Australian National University Bu Wilson says the court's decision could leave the door open for challenges to the actions of the U-N police over the past two years.

WILSON: In theory what it can actually mean that all the executive policing decisions that have been made by the United Nations Police including arrests, including suspensions is potentially not legally valid.

MARCH: The East Timorese constitution says all treaties and conventions between the government another body must be ratified by the parliament.

However, Government spokesman Agio Pereira says what that means exactly ... is unclear.

PEREIRA: East Timor still lacks a law that outlined the details of what kind of conventions and treaties or other documents need to be ratified by the parliament.

MARCH: The government says it's now working with the United Nations on a new agreement.

However, East Timor's Opposition spokesman Jose Teixeira says the court's decision could have implications beyond the case of one police officer.

TEIXEIRA: The important issue here is that it may create some level of impunity amongst police officers who may feel that now they are not under anyone's disciplinary action.

MARCH: Academic Bu Wilson says power struggles and logistic challenges have caused relations between the U-N police and the local force - known as the PNTL - to deteriorate.

WILSON: For a very long time they were not actually co-located so you had the UN police doing their thing in one place, and the PNTL doing their thing in another place with very little cooperation.

MARCH: The United Nations hopes to gradually hand back responsibility for internal security to the local force in the first half of this year.

But academic Bu Wilson says there is little evidence attempts to reform the PNTL have been effective.

WILSON: The Timorese police are still not a strong institution, they are not a particularly accountable institution, and they are also deeply factionalised. So, I think it's not a strong institution and I think the potential for it to unravel and the potential for conflict with the army is always there.