

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/asia-risible-fine-for-minister-who-12-07-2011,39692.html>

Asia - Asia

Inadequate sentence

Risible fine for minister who assaulted newspaper publisher

12 July 2011

Reporters Without Borders deplores the risible fine of 15,000 vatu (120 euros) that a court in Port Vila, the capital of the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, imposed on infrastructure and public utilities minister Harry Iauko on 8 July for a physical attack on *Daily Post* publisher **Marc Neil-Jones** in March.

"It is unacceptable that a government minister should get off with such a small fine for assaulting a journalist who criticized him," Reporters Without Borders said. "The fine is not commensurate with the gravity of the crime and sends the wrong signal to all of Vanuatu's journalists. We call on the courts to review this sentence in order to protect the media. Failure to do so would encourage journalists to censor themselves."

Neil-Jones was attacked in his office on 4 March by a total of eight men including Iauko. According to Neil-Jones, the minister accused him of writing "bad things" about him, alluding to articles criticising the minister's handling of various issues and alleged embezzlement by Airports Vanuatu Ltd, an aviation company that works closely with the government.

The seven other men involved in the attack were given fines of up to 1,000 dollars.

Helped by thugs, cabinet minister beats up newspaper publisher

07-03-2011

Reporters Without Borders condemns a brutal attack on *Daily Post* publisher **Marc Neil-Jones** in Port Vila, the capital of the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, on 4 March. Neil-Jones accuses infrastructure and public utilities minister Harry Iauko of organizing and participating in the assault, which was took place in the journalist's office.

"Threats and acts of violence against a journalist who is just doing his job are unacceptable," Reporters Without Borders said. "We warn Prime Minister Sato Kilman that his credibility will be questioned if this goes unpunished. We urge the police to carry out an exhaustive investigation without delay and we urge the prime minister to do everything possible to ensure its success. Otherwise he will be regarded as an accomplice to violence by a member of his government."

Neil-Jones said he was attacked and beaten in his office by a total of eight men including Iauko, who accused him of writing "bad things" about him. His newspaper has published articles criticising the minister's handling of various issues. It has also raised questions about Airports Vanuatu Ltd, an aviation company that works closely with the government.

After leaving Neil-Jones unconscious on the floor, Iauko went to editor **Royson Willie** and said to him: "Do you want me to break your face?"

Neil-Jones has filed a complaint against the minister. Yesterday he said: "I can't think of many countries where a minister of state would survive long if he marched into a national newspaper with a gang of thugs employed within the ministry and assaulted the publisher of a national daily paper because he didn't like the valid criticism he was getting from all quarters, including the newspaper, members of the public through letters to the editor and Transparency International."

The publisher was previously attacked on 17 January 2009 by four police officers employed by

the prison department. They were arrested but the investigation never established who was behind the attack.
