



East Timor rejects Australian claims in The Hague

By Europe correspondent Mary Gearin

Updated Thu 23 Jan 2014, 1:20am AEDT

East Timor has rejected Australia's suggestion to the International Court of Justice that Dili may have encouraged the commission of a crime when it gained information from a former spy.

Australia is refusing East Timor's request to hand back material seized in last year's ASIO raids on the offices of Dili's legal counsel.

East Timor's ambassador to the UK Joaquim da Fonseca has described as outrageous Australia's suggestion that East Timor may have encouraged a crime by obtaining classified information from a disaffected former spy about alleged espionage in 2004.

"Such expression of distrust falls short of recognition and appreciation of our broader relationship," he said.

"I must firmly reject this careless and outrageous suggestion."

Lawyers for East Timor told the court Australia seized the materials from lawyer Bernard Collaery's office because they might contain details that Australia gained information to which it was not entitled.

Counsel told the judges that East Timor owns the seized material, and that Australia has not proved otherwise.

Australia will have a chance to respond later on the last day of the hearing.

East Timor says national security violated

East Timor is in the court at The Hague demanding Australia return documents taken in the raids on the office and house of lawyer Mr Collaery last year.

Dili says its national security and sovereignty was violated and that Australia has breached international law.

The seized material is thought to contain details of allegations that Canberra spied on Timor during oil and gas treaty negotiations.

East Timor has argued the raids put Dili at considerable disadvantage in its current arbitration process, in which it is challenging the validity of the treaty.

Australia has not specifically addressed what aspect of national security was at stake to trigger last year's raids.

Earlier in the hearing East Timor's leading counsel Sir Eli Lauterpacht called the raids "unprecedented, improper and inexplicable".

Topics: international-law, government-and-politics, east-timor, australia, pacific

First posted Thu 23 Jan 2014, 12:12am AEDT