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Tips and rumours May 9, 2016

Witness K gets international recognition

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It's one of the more disgraceful, and criminally underreported, examples of the current government's war on whistleblowers (and one entirely supported by Labor): the harassment of Witness K, the former ASIS agent who revealed [ASIS' illegal bugging](#) of the East Timorese government in 2004 for the benefit of Australian resources companies.

Later today, Witness K's actions will be recognised at the Blueprint Prize for Free Speech awards in London. K, who, as a former ASIS agent, cannot be identified, will be acknowledged by the committee along with three other individuals "who displayed great bravery and integrity in revealing a truth for the greater public good". The award committee says:

"In 2004, Witness K refused to be involved in an ASIS operation to 'bug' the cabinet rooms of Timor Leste during negotiations for a proposed oil and gas treaty between Timor Leste and Australia. Witness K determined that the operation's main purpose was one of commercial espionage not a matter of national security. When Timor Leste commenced international arbitration proceedings against Australia in The Hague to have the oil and gas treaty overturned, Witness K was prepared to attend as a key witness for Timor Leste.

"To prevent him leaving the country ASIO raided K's home and his lawyer's office. K's passport and other materials were seized from him. His passport is still retained. Criminal proceedings have been threatened against him and the investigation is ongoing. Witness K's courage in standing up to secret and powerful

forces demonstrated his strong moral compass in the performance of his duties.”

It’s important to note that Witness K did not act as a whistleblower. Witness K and his lawyer, Bernard Collaery, broke no laws in relation to the revelation, but they were acting in compliance with the advice of the former Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security Ian Carnell about how Witness K should pursue a complaint about his treatment at the hands of ASIS. In response to the award, Collaery said:

“K, an Australian war veteran, was deeply moved by the suffering of the people of East Timor. Cheating the Timorese in revenue negotiations on behalf of major petroleum producers had no connection with Australia’s national security. K has been harassed, deprived of a passport and threatened with prosecution. K is an Australian hero. I am very proud that he has received this international acknowledgement.”

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