

Witness K must be freed

One of the most startling cases of a government using the fig leaf of “national security” to protect its own interests is happening right before our eyes — and it should have Australians up in arms.

Yesterday, the [ABC revealed](#) that Foreign Minister Julie Bishop had intervened, on national security grounds, to prevent a former ASIS agent from having his passport returned. “Witness K”, as he is known, is the former intelligence agent who revealed that ASIS had bugged East Timor’s government in 2004. The then-Howard government ordered the bugging to gain advantage over East Timor in negotiations over resources in the Timor Sea.

Whatever the dubious morality of Australia cheating a struggling micro-state, the bugging was plainly illegal under Australian law. In contrast, Witness K’s revelation of the operation was entirely legal.

But while ASIS and its then director have entirely escaped scrutiny for this crime, Witness K has been raided by police and ASIO and had his passport taken, in order to prevent him from travelling overseas to give evidence in East Timor’s case against Australia in The Hague.

The current head of ASIO has said he has not taken any action on national security grounds against Witness K, making it clear that it’s the government — not ASIO — that wants Witness K confined to Australia.

This harassment and vilification of a man who has loyally served his country is plainly designed to try to cover up the crime perpetrated by ASIS and the Howard government’s extraordinary cynicism in seeking advantage over the East Timorese, to the benefit of Australian resources companies.