

# Timorese to take giant petition to Australian Embassy in Dili

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Issue [1196](/glw-issues/1196) (</glw-issues/1196>) // [East Timor](/country/east-timor) (</country/east-timor>)



Activists from the Movement Against Occupation of The Timor Sea (MKOTT) mobilising public support for Witness K and Bernard Collaery. Photo by MKOTT.

Activists from the Movement Against Occupation of The Timor Sea (MKOTT) are mobilising public support in Timor-Leste for former Australian spy "Witness K" and his lawyer Bernard Collaery as their prosecution by the Australian government begins in Canberra on September 12.

The two are being prosecuted for allegedly disclosing information about Australia's installation of listening devices (under the cover of an Australian government-funded aid project) in the PM's and Cabinet offices of Timor-Leste, during

critical negotiations over resources in Timor Sea.

MKOTT activists have prepared a 10-metre long banner which they plan to fill with the signatures of Timorese people opposing the prosecution of "Witness K" and Collaery and then deliver it to the Australian embassy in Dili on September 17.

Protests calling for the charges to be dropped are being in Australia as the trial begins.

According to Sister Susan Connelly of the Timor Sea Justice Forum, between 2004 and 2006

the offices of the East Timorese Prime Minister were being refurbished with Australia's help as an AusAid project. The walls were later found to have had listening devices placed in them by the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), thus enabling the Timorese negotiators to be overheard.

One of those involved in the operation, "Witness K", complained to his superiors upon finding that one of the oil companies involved, Woodside, employed the services of retired political figures who had been connected to the negotiations. These included one time foreign minister Alexander Downer and Ashton Calvert, a secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Witness K engaged the services of Bernard Collaery, a Canberra lawyer with extensive experience in Timorese matters.

Timor-Leste took Australia to the International Court over the espionage. In 2013, as the case was about to be heard in The Hague, Collaery's Canberra offices were raided by ASIO and his papers taken. Witness K's passport was seized, preventing his evidence being given. In 2017 negotiations were recommenced to set a proper maritime border between Australia and Timor-Leste under international law. The new border treaty was signed in March, 2018.

In May 2018, more than four years after the espionage and a few months after the border treaty was signed, charges were laid against Witness K and Bernard Collaery under the Criminal Code and the *Intelligence Services Act 2001*. The charges claim that between May 2008 and March 2014 they made known information about ASIS operations. If convicted, they could be jailed for two years.

Sister Connelly said that the prosecution attempts to make a crime out of the action of reporting a crime, "exonerates economic espionage" and blurs economic interest into "national interest".

### **Protest actions in Australia against Witness K & Bernard Collaery prosecution:**

**Canberra:** Protest outside ACT Magistrates Court

4 Knowles Place.

Wednesday September 12, 8.30am.

Speakers include: Andrew Wilkie (Independent MP), Rebekha Sharkie (Centre Alliance MP); Nick McKim (Greens Senator) and Sister Susan Connelly (Timor Sea Justice Forum)

**Sydney:** Peaceful picket Commonwealth Offices

1 Bligh Street, corner of Bent & O'Connell St, Sydney

Wednesday September 12, 12-2pm.