

Timor-Leste: Activists demand Australia drop prosecution of Collaery and Witness K

Susan Price, Green Left Weekly September 6, 2019

Well-known justice activist Shirley Shackleton managed to interrupt celebrations in Dili marking the 20th anniversary of Timor Leste's independence to hand a petition demanding Australia end its persecution of Bernard Collaery and Witness K to Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne.

Shackleton's husband, Greg, was murdered in Balibo along with four other journalists in 1975. She has never given up the quest for justice.

The petition called on Federal Attorney-General Christian Porter to use his power under section 71 of the *Judiciary Act (1903)* to immediately stop the prosecution of Collaery and Witness K.

The petition was organised by the Movement against the Occupation of the Timor Sea (MKOTT) and had been signed by more than 4050 Timorese.

Daily protests in support of Collaery and Witness K were also organised in the week leading up to the anniversary celebrations.

MKOTT spokesperson Tomas Freitas said that support for the petition was widespread, including from students, activists, journalists, NGO workers and government officials. "This is a testament to the genuine wish of the people of Timor Leste for their prosecution not to stain the bilateral relations of Australia and Timor Leste," Freitas said.

Witness K and Collaery revealed that Australia had bugged East Timor cabinet meetings in 2004 during negotiations over the Timor Sea boundary and its oil and gas reserves.

"MKOTT wishes to remind Prime Minister Scott Morrison once again, that if it was not for both Witness K and Bernard Collaery, this treaty would not have been negotiated, agreed and signed," Freitas said. "We, therefore, urge Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his government to treat this petition as a matter of priority and urgent."

Freitas said that the celebrations, which also marked the ratification of the maritime boundary treaty, "would not be complete without the freedom of Bernard Collaery and Witness K, the heroes and great friends of the people of Timor Leste".

TempoTimor [reported](#) on August 30 that, in defiance of a government ban on protests during the anniversary celebrations, activists managed to unfurl a banner in solidarity with Collaery and Witness K on a yacht in Dili's harbour — right across from the government palace.