

## Timorese hail Witness K and Bernard Collaery as 'heroes'

**Peter Boyle**, Dili, August 9, 2019

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The Movement Against the Occupation of the Timor Sea (MKOTT), a Timorese activist group based in Dili, condemned the Australian government on August 9 for its ongoing prosecution of Witness K and his lawyer Bernard Collaery, over the exposure of Australian secret service bugging of Timorese government offices, labelling it as an "attack on freedom of expression and democracy".

Timor-Leste is preparing to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the referendum in 1999, when the Timorese people voted overwhelmingly to be independent of Indonesian occupation. On the same day (August 30), the governments of Timor-Leste and Australia will finally ratify the hard-fought-over treaty on the maritime boundary between these neighbouring countries.

The exposure of the Australian secret service's corrupt and illegal bugging put pressure on Australia to finally accept, in 2018, a boundary treaty agreed in a facilitated conciliation process under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

A petition launched by MKOTT at the media conference said:

"While Timor-Leste and Australia are about to celebrate this important occasion, we the undersigned note with great regret that the Australian government has continued its prosecution of Lawyer Bernard Collaery and Witness K. These two are heroes of the maritime boundary agreement and thus their prosecution will pollute the celebration and the bilateral relations."

The petition called on the Australian federal attorney-general to use his power under section 71 of the *Judiciary Act (1903)* to immediately put a stop to the prosecution.



Media conference of the Movement Against the Occupation of the Timor Sea (MKOTT), Dili August 9, 2019. Photo by Tomas Freitas