

Spying on Timor: Government, not whistleblowers should be on trial

By Erwin Chlanda in Alice Springs News, 11 November 2020



A local group joined in with national protests against the prosecution starting in Canberra of a whistleblower and his lawyer who exposed the Australian Government allegedly spying on the East Timorese Government offices during oil and gas negotiations in 2004, under the guise of implementing an Australian aid program.

Kim McGrath, in the July edition of *Foreign Affairs*, writes Xanana Gusmão, East Timorese independence leader and its first president would, if necessary, give evidence at the trial against Bernard Collaery and Witness K.

“He saw them as ‘honourable men’ who should have been lauded for their actions,” writes Ms McGrath, “a crime against one of the poorest countries in the world, by one of the richest.

“From his viewpoint, they had revealed a crime,” secreting listening devices in the Palácio do Governo built with Australian foreign aid.

One of the Alice Springs protesters, Jonathan Pilbrow, says they are “greatly concerned that a whistle-blower and his lawyer are the ones who are on trial for exposing Federal Government wrongdoing.

“The reality is that the courageous and conscientious actions of Witness K and Mr Collaery led to a fairer sharing of the resources of the Timor Sea.

“These men acted in good faith when our government failed to do so. They bravely stood up to government wrongdoing.

“The Australian government commenced prosecutions against them in May 2018, without explanation.

“We are therefore calling for the prosecutions against the two men to be dropped.”

Photo at top: Standing at the back are Fred Richardson, Jonathan Pilbrow, Nadine Williams, Blair McFarland and Bob Durnan. Crouched at the front: David Sprigg and Harshini Bartlett.