

ACT Courts Canberra
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In 1975, five Australian-based journalists – Malcolm Rennie, Greg Shackleton, Tony Stewart, Gary Cunningham and Brian Peters – were near the town of Balibó, in Portuguese Timor, reporting on the impending Indonesian invasion.

On 16 October that year – 45 years ago this Friday – they were murdered by the Indonesian military, specifically by Yunus Yosfiah and Cristoforo da Silva, to prevent information about the invasion being broadcast.

Eight investigations have been held. The last was a Coroner’s Inquest in Sydney in 2007, and the findings, which named the murderers, were handed over to the Australian Federal Police.

Seven years later, in October 2014, the AFP dropped the investigation, citing “insufficient evidence” and “jurisdictional challenges”.

No one has been held accountable for the murders of the Balibó Five. To this day, relevant documents are denied to the Australian public on the grounds of “national security”.

The journalists were murdered because they were telling the truth about Indonesia’s preparations for its invasion of Portuguese Timor. Reasons for the Australian refusal to release documents are clearly to conceal the true extent of Australian complicity in the invasion, and to avoid offending Indonesia for fear of economic or political repercussions.

Truth has been ignored.

The politicians of 1975 are mostly gone, and those few remaining are aged, in declining health, with the power they had only a memory. Only Tom Uren, Ken Fry and a couple of others questioned Australia’s refusal to stand up for its own.

These days we have other deeply disturbing situations concerning Australia, Timor-Leste, and corporate interests. Our politicians hold political responsibility in an environment of controlled secrecy.

Last week we sent each of them a letter with the Statement calling for the dropping of the prosecutions of Witness K and Bernard Collaery. Thanks to the generosity of Ian Melrose, the Statement was printed in the Public Sector Informant, the Canberra Times and The Saturday Paper. The endorsers of the Statement are among the increasing numbers of Australians who do not believe that the claim of “national security” deserves any more credence than it has in the matter of the Balibó Five.

Australia spied on one of the poorest nations on earth for financial gain. We should admit it, take what’s coming to us, and get on with life. As it is, the whole world is becoming more aware that we spied, lied, and are now prosecuting those who told the truth. The 41st scheduled hearing in the ACT Courts is happening as we gather, and the cost to the Australian tax-payer is upwards of \$2 million – so far. The concealment of government swindling and lying is clearly in the service of revenge. It serves as a warning to others not to allow conscience to be placed before the state.

There are a few politicians who have spoken out. They include Rex Patrick, Nick McKim, Luke Gosling, Graham Perrett, Alicia Payne, Stirling Griff, Andrew Leigh, Rebekha Sharkie, Andrew Wilkie, Sarah Hanson-Young. Even Albo recently said it should never have happened.

Our efforts on behalf of Witness K and his lawyer are not about “getting” politicians. We’re not here to pay them back, to sully anyone’s memory, or to forget the dedication and hard work of so many of them, past and present. They’re human, just like us, and we all make mistakes.

But the worst mistake is to continue to deceive, to continue to pretend that the security of this nation depends on covering up what is in plain sight, to continue to sacrifice courageous patriots to save the reputations of others, to continue to conceal the corruption of past and present administrations.

Five journalists were murdered forty-five years ago as they tried to tell the truth, and few politicians of the time, or since, have spoken up for them. Will our present politicians allow the truth-tellers, Witness K and Bernard Collaery, to go to jail on their watch?

We must continually take this up to them. They make the policy decisions and they pass the laws.

Let us become pebbles in their shoes.