

Blueprint for Free Speech

Citation for Bernard Collaery

The two winners of the 2020 Blueprint for Free Speech prizes, which recognise whistleblowers whose bravery and integrity have made a positive impact in the public interest, are awarded today, Wednesday 2nd December. The award gives special recognition for individuals and organisations opposing corruption, political collusion, mistreatment of asylum seekers and professional misconduct.

Sally Masterson, former Lloyds Banking Group employee, awarded for revealing a failure to act on evidence of the fraud and contribution to see justice for a crime that could figure more than a billion pounds

Bernard Collaery awarded for his legal support for Witness K, who had been thwarted from giving evidence at a Hague court regarding the Australian Government's illegally accessing the top-secret cabinet discussions of the Timor Leste Government and exploitation this information during negotiations of the Timor Sea Treaty, to the disadvantage of the people of Timor Leste (East Timor)

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Bernard Collaery, is awarded the Blueprint International Prize for his continued legal support to the former senior ASIS intelligence officer, known only as Witness K. Bernard is now in his 70s and has been involved in this case for seven years. With criminal charges now raised against Bernard and Witness K for allegedly conspiring to communicate secret information to the Government of Timor-Leste, the action has effectively ended Bernard's career, regardless of the outcome of the trial.

The beginnings of this case go back to 2004 when it is alleged the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) bugged the East Timor (Timor Leste) Cabinet Office at Dili to obtain information that would allow Australia to gain the upper hand in negotiations over the rich oil & gas fields in the Timor Gap, a stretch of sea between Australia and Timor.

In 2012, the former senior ASIS intelligence officer who led the bugging operation, known only as Witness K, was due to give evidence at an international court in The Hague. The Australian Government had illegally accessed the top-secret cabinet discussions of the Timor Leste Government. It exploited this information during negotiations about the Timor Sea Treaty to obtain more of the undersea resources: oil, gas and helium revenues. The beneficiaries were resource mining companies. Working with Witness K for years on how the people of one of the poorest countries in the world, Timor Leste, were exploited, Bernard is now accused of conspiring to communicate secret information to the Government of Timor-Leste. The Australian Lawyers Association has called these allegations "an attack on the legal profession" and the case is widely considered to be a political attack against Bernard and Witness K. The Australian Government is forcing Bernard's court proceedings to be held in secret, away from public scrutiny.

Bernard is being awarded for his continued legal support for Witness K despite professional difficulties in continued alignment against his own government and now a personal political attack against him. It is important that whistleblowers are supported from a legal perspective

and Bernard's refusal to back down or lessen his support is commendable.

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£12,000 prize money will be given to Bernard Collaery and Sally Masterton as recipients of the Blueprint International Whistleblowing Prize (£10,000) and UK Whistleblowing Prize (£2,000). This year's winners were chosen by the panel of three judges: Lady Sue Woodford-Hollick OBE, award winning former investigative television journalist and current businesswoman, Dr Suelette Dreyfus, award-winning writer and academic, and James Catlin, an Australian barrister with particular expertise in fraud, media law, unfair trade practices and protected disclosures.