

Statement by His Excellency, Xanana Gusmão, on the discontinuation of the Prosecution of Bernard Collaery

I commend the decision of the Government of Australia to discontinue the prosecution against Mr Bernard Collaery.

I have written to the Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, thanking him and his government for the decision which has been made in the interests of justice and the relationship of friendship between Timor-Leste and Australia.

Mr Collaery was being prosecuted for alleged breaches of Australian national security laws by disclosing that the Australian intelligence services bugged Timor-Leste's cabinet room during oil and gas negotiations. The bugging of Timor-Leste's cabinet room, which was undertaken for commercial purposes, was illegal and unconscionable.

The Timorese people are grateful for the courage shown by Mr Collaery and supported the stand that he took in this matter. Mr Collaery and his client, Witness K, are greatly respected in Timor-Leste. We recognise their enormous contribution to our struggle to achieve permanent maritime boundaries with Australia in the Timor Sea.

The President of the Republic, His Excellency Dr José Ramos-Horta, worked tirelessly behind the scenes and through public advocacy on behalf of Mr Collaery to have the prosecution stopped.

I have consistently called for the charges against Mr Collaery to be dropped. I was honoured to provide a number of affidavits to the Australian courts in support of Mr Collaery and was prepared to travel to Canberra to give evidence in court.

I also raised the matter directly with the previous Australian Prime Minister as well as with the newly elected Prime Minister, the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP. I would also like to thank the Hon Tanya Plibersek, the Australian Minister for the Environment and Water, who I met on the sidelines of UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon on 30 June 2022, who showed a profound understanding of Timor-Leste's concerns about the prosecution and took such prompt action to raise the matter within her government.

I want to acknowledge the contribution of civil society in Australia, and around the world. Activists, lawyers, academics, Members of Parliament, supporters of Timor-Leste and many others campaigned for years to have this prosecution dropped. This is also an important day for them.

The decision of the Australian Government to discontinue the prosecution is just and fair. It is the right decision for the relationship between Timor-Leste and Australia. The decision allows our countries to move forward in a positive way to strengthen our relationship of friendship and cooperation.

7 July 2022