

LIBERTY VICTORIA

Press Release - Liberty Victoria honours Bernard Collaery and Witness J with the Empty Chair Human Rights Award.

The secret trials of lawyer Bernard Collaery and Witness J challenge one of the fundamental bases of our legal system: the requirement for open justice and accountability.

In recognition of these extraordinary events it is my privilege to announce Bernard Collaery and Witness J as joint winners of Liberty Victoria's Empty Chair Award, and to invite you to hear from Bernard at the Voltaire Awards Webinar on Friday 24 July at 7pm.

As you may be aware, Bernard Collaery is accused of sharing protected intelligence information by helping his client, the former spy Witness K, expose Australia's alleged bugging of Timor-Leste government offices in 2004. The alleged activity took place during negotiations to divide lucrative oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea.

As in the Witness J case, the Attorney-General issued a national security certificate to keep some of the material to be used in this trial classified. The court has recently upheld the certificate and part of the trial will be held in secret.

Witness J was secretly charged, secretly tried and secretly jailed, in the ACT. He was jailed in the sex-offenders and paedophile wing of the Andrew Maconochie Centre (AMC) in Canberra. His offence had nothing at all to do with sex-offences or paedophilia. When the fact of his incarceration was first learned, the Attorney-General of the ACT had no knowledge of the fact of his incarceration at the AMC. To this day, no-one is allowed to know his name or the offence with which he was charged. His is a classic case of a secret trial

Witness J was convicted of national security related offences and was sentenced to two years and seven months' imprisonment.

Open justice is under threat

The cases of Bernard Collaery and Witness J highlight the need for strong action to ensure that any such trials are held in open court and subject to public scrutiny.

The Empty Chair Award is given to a person or people who are worthy to receive a Voltaire Award, but cannot be present to receive it because they have been silenced by the authorities.

Not only must justice be done, it must be seen to be done. The holding of secret trials goes against the requirements for open justice and accountability.

These laws and practices should not go unchallenged

If you cherish the rule of law and an open judicial system, please join the Voltaire Awards Webinar on Friday 24 July at 7pm. It's an opportunity to hear from Bernard himself.

There will also be a live Q & A session you can take part in.

We hope you can [join us on July 24th for the Liberty Victoria Voltaire Human Rights Awards](#)

For enquiries contact Liberty Victoria at info@libertyvictoria.org.au or phone 03 9670 6422

Media Release

[Liberty Victoria](#)

info@libertyvictoria.org.au

Liberty Victoria
GPO Box 3161
MELBOURNE VIC 3001
Australia