

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, with regard to their inquiry into matters related to supporting democracy in our region.

Democracy necessarily requires trust and accountability. Thus to promote democracy in our region, Australia, and especially its federal government and agencies, needs to model the behaviour we seek to encourage, to demonstrate that it works, how it works, and how it is beneficial to all.

In the recent past, Australia has engaged in activities against our near neighbours that are hardly likely to encourage an emulation of our democratic processes.

For example, Australia's 2004 espionage against East Timor, in seeking to gain an unfair advantage in commercial negotiations, was a clear example of the sort of behaviour that is not only undemocratic, but explicitly anti-democratic, as it sought to undermine the will and decision-making by a democratically elected, and supposedly friendly regional government. That the espionage was against a much smaller and much poorer and vulnerable country, made the espionage particularly egregious.

As the Australian government has

- a) refused to admit its wrongdoing,
- b) persecuted by drawn-out and secretive prosecutions the two persons (Witness K and Mr Bernard Collaery) who bravely and correctly brought this matter to international public attention, and
- c) neither pardoned Witness K, nor offered him or Mr Collaery any apology or compensation for the years of legal threats, which have taken an enormous psychological and financial toll,

any regional government would rightly view Australia's attempts to encourage democracy as utter hypocrisy. Until Australia is willing to admit its mistakes, offer full and free compensation to its victims here and abroad, and promise not to engage in such clearly hostile and selfish activity against vulnerable neighbours, we cannot hope to have them embrace the advantages of accountable, free and fair democratic government. Indeed, if we do not apologise and atone, it is clearly in the interests of foreign governments to avoid democracy, and seek security (from further hostility by Australia!) in authoritarianism and alliances with authoritarian regimes with the power to oppose Australia's disreputable and criminal activities.

Australia needs to model the advantages of democracy, both for its own sake (as the best form of governance man had yet devised, and one which respects the dignity of all within its community), and also for the clear social and economic benefits that will accrue to a region where open, honest communication, accountability and dialogue rather than confrontation prevail. But while the government continues to choose to use 'democracy' at home, and spruiked abroad, as a cover for selfish and hostile activities against smaller neighbours, as a smokescreen for morally condemnable activities, we will fail to encourage democracy, or

even friendship in other states, and will only drive them further into the arms of other, more dangerous allies.

Democracy is inseparable from its underlying conditions of openness, honesty, charity and accountability.

Australia needs to make a clear break with its recent past, apologise and atone, and demonstrate real justice and accountability. Only by doing so will we demonstrate the superiority of democracy, and its clear benefits. Any attempt to continue to ignore or hide our disgraceful past, especially by pretending it is a matter of 'national security', and therefore not open to scrutiny, gives the lie to any attempt to promote democracy domestically or abroad. And thus without atonement and a clear and explicit change mindset, any monies or effort spent on promoting democracy abroad will be a complete waste of taxpayer funds, and an ongoing drain on our national reputation, which remains badly sullied.