

# WikiLeaks wins top Australian journalism prize

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The WikiLeaks website has won Australian journalism's most prestigious annual prize—the Walkley Award for Outstanding Contribution to Journalism. Chosen by a panel of journalists and photographers, a Walkley is the national equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize in the US.

Presenting the award at a dinner attended by over 700 journalists on Sunday night, the Walkley trustees said WikiLeaks had penetrated “the inner workings of government to reveal an avalanche of inconvenient truths.”

They added: “Its revelations, from the way the war on terror was being waged, to diplomatic bastardry, high-level horse-trading and the interference in the domestic affairs of nations, have had an undeniable impact. This innovation could just as easily have been developed and nurtured by any of the world's major publishers—but it wasn't.”

The website and its editor-in-chief Julian Assange, the trustees concluded, had taken “a brave, determined and independent stand for freedom of speech and transparency that has empowered people all over the world. And in the process, they have triggered a robust debate inside and outside the media about official secrecy, the public's right to know, and the future of journalism.”

The Walkley Award is one of a number of journalism prizes won by WikiLeaks in recent years, including Amnesty International's UK Media Award and the acclaimed Martha Gellhorn Prize. The latter award is given to journalists who reveal “an unpalatable truth that exposes establishment propaganda.” These prizes undermine the Obama administration's claims that Assange is not a journalist and that the publication of

thousands of secret US diplomatic and military cables is illegal.

Sunday's award is particularly significant because it flies in the face of a vicious US-government led assault on WikiLeaks and is another indication of the depth of support for Assange among journalists.

Serious journalists in Australia and internationally know that the WikiLeaks editor-in-chief is being persecuted for exposing government criminality and lies. Assange, in fact, is doing what they are supposed to do. There is a clear recognition, moreover, that if the attacks on Assange are successful and WikiLeaks silenced, then other journalists could be targeted and victimised.

The Obama administration's campaign against WikiLeaks is aimed at shutting down the anti-secrecy website and extraditing its editor to the US for a grand jury trial on espionage charges. Sections of the US media and leading political figures have called for Assange to be assassinated and his website declared a terrorist organisation.

Assange has been held under virtual house arrest in Britain for almost a year, following frame-up allegations of rape and sexual assault in Sweden. He is currently attempting to secure the right of appeal, after Britain's High Court recently dismissed a previous appeal against extradition to Sweden.

The Australian Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard has categorically refused to condemn US media death threats against Assange or the Swedish extradition order. Last year Gillard claimed that the posting of US diplomatic cables on WikiLeaks was “grossly irresponsible” and “illegal.” Attorney General

Robert McClelland hinted that Assange's passport could be confiscated.

While Assange was unable to travel to Brisbane to accept the Walkley Award, he told journalists in a pre-recorded video acceptance speech that WikiLeaks was fulfilling a thirst for honest information among ordinary people.

"The Australian people," he said, "want to know the truth about war. They want to know who they can trust. They want to know how the world is shaped about them. They want to find a way through complexity and lies."

Assange said the banking blockade against WikiLeaks by Visa, MasterCard, PayPal, the Bank of America and Western Union revealed these financial institutions as "instruments" of Washington foreign policy. "Censorship has in this manner been privatised," he said. "Washington is waging a war against the truth. It was, after all, the truth about Washington and their friends that we revealed."

Assange said Gillard's response to the US campaign against WikiLeaks was "cowardly", "craven" and "embarrassing." He recalled her mobilisation of the entire security apparatus, including the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), against WikiLeaks.

"This time last year, Julia Gillard commissioned an absurd whole of government task force against us, comprising of ASIO, ASIS, the Department of Defence, the Attorney General's Office and the Australian Federal Police (AFP). The prime minister falsely stated that WikiLeaks had acted illegally. The AFP had to take the embarrassing role of correcting her," he said.

"The attorney general stated that he was looking in to cancelling my passport, while I was under dire circumstances. After pressure from the Australian people and the Australian media, McClelland decided not to, saying not that it was wrong but that it was helpful for tracing my movements."

The WikiLeaks' editor-in-chief went on to condemn the detention of US military intelligence analyst Bradley Manning, currently imprisoned in solitary confinement and falsely accused of collaborating with Assange.

Assange said WikiLeaks supporters in the US, Europe and the UK had been "arrested en masse with over 78 raids on various individuals." These incidents, he continued, demonstrated "that in the West such attacks are no less vicious than in other parts of the world. They are simply more sophisticated. Washington has become an empire, not only of force, but of lies.

"The Australian Government has refused to say whether it would block my extradition to the United States from Australia, but it has acknowledged that it has the political discretion to do so. The Gillard government has shown its true colours in relation to how it's handled US pressure on WikiLeaks."

Assange concluded his speech by declaring that "as long as we can speak out, as long as we can publish, and as long as the internet remains free, we will continue to fight back, armed with the truth."

There has been a deafening silence from Gillard and other Labor government members in response to Assange's speech and the Walkley Award, demonstrating that the government's campaign against the 40-year-old Australian citizen and WikiLeaks is continuing.

Australia's corporate media has been equally silent. Apart from some perfunctory online articles, Assange's comments have been entirely missing from Australia's major newspapers. There was no report of the awards or Assange's defiant speech in the print editions of Fairfax Media's dailies—the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*—or the Murdoch-owned *Australian*. Instead, all three newspapers ran front-page photo stories featuring Gillard at Sunday's annual Aria Music Awards.

*Assange's video acceptance speech is available in full here*



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