

WikiLeaks founder Assange seeks asylum in Ecuadorian embassy in London

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20 June 2012

Julian Assange sought political asylum Tuesday at the Ecuadorian Embassy in Britain. The WikiLeaks founder walked into the embassy in London's Knightsbridge district, asking for asylum under the United Nations Human Rights Declaration.

Assange's asylum application said he was forced to make his request because his lawyers had received a "factual statement of abandonment" from the Australian government. "Such statements," he said, "make it impossible for me to return to my home country."

Assange said he faced being interrogated in Sweden, "where its top officials have openly attacked me," and being indicted "for political crimes in the United States of America, a country where the death penalty for such offenses is still in force."

Ricardo Patino, Ecuador's foreign minister, told reporters in Quito, "Ecuador is studying and analyzing the request." A message posted on the WikiLeaks Twitter account read: "We will have more details on the Ecuadorian situation soon."

The move by Assange is the latest in an effort to halt his extradition to Sweden, where he faces trumped-up allegations of sexual misconduct. Assange has denied the allegations.

He was arrested in London in December 2010 on a European arrest warrant. Assange has never been charged with any crime, in Sweden or elsewhere.

Last week, the United Kingdom Supreme Court, Britain's highest court, unanimously rejected Assange's final bid to reopen the appeal against his extradition. The June 14 ruling upheld a May 30 decision by the Supreme Court judges, who by a 5 to 2 majority rejected arguments by Assange's lawyers that

the European warrant for his arrest and extradition was invalid.

Lawyers for the WikiLeaks editor had argued that the warrant was invalid, as it was issued by a Swedish prosecutor, who was not a "judicial authority" under UK extradition laws.

Barring asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy or any other last-minute efforts, Assange could be forcibly removed to Sweden as early as June 28. In Sweden, he could be held—and detained incommunicado for months—before any charges were laid related to the dubious allegations of sexual assault.

In Sweden, Assange would in all likelihood be held in much more restrictive conditions than those during his 18-month house arrest in Britain. This could effectively put an end to his already restricted ability to defend himself publicly, participate in the work of WikiLeaks and communicate with the media.

If extradited to Sweden, Assange could then face extradition to the United States. The Obama administration has prepared a secret Grand Jury indictment on charges of espionage, based on the publication by WikiLeaks of documents exposing war crimes and intrigues by the US and other governments around the world. He could also be held indefinitely and without trial under the police-state provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act signed by Obama last December 31.

Assange was arrested in 2010, only days after WikiLeaks released thousands of secret US embassy cables that detailed the involvement of the US and

other governments in torture, renditions, assassinations and regime-change. The Obama administration's witch-hunt against Assange came in response, in particular, to WikiLeaks' release of thousands of documents exposing the criminal nature of the US-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Assange could still appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on the grounds that he has not received a fair hearing in the British Courts. While his lawyers have yet to decide whether to file such an appeal, legal experts say it is unlikely the ECHR would accept the case.



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