

Swedish prosecutors to question Julian Assange in Ecuador's London embassy

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Swedish prosecutors will question Julian Assange inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

The WikiLeaks founder and editor has been trapped there since being granted asylum four years ago this month.

Assange is wanted on trumped-up “minor rape” allegations, which were revived by the Swedish state in September 2010, having been earlier dropped as groundless, in order to provide the legal justification for his extradition to Sweden. Once there, Assange fears he will be extradited to the United States where a sealed Grand Jury indictment involving espionage charges is awaiting him.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions (UNWGAD) earlier this year declared, “If Mr. Assange leaves the confines of the Embassy, he forfeits his most effective and potentially only protection against refoulement to United States of America.”

The Working Group stated that his confinement violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and amounts to arbitrary detention by Sweden and Britain. Its ruling that Assange should be released and given compensation was rejected by both countries.

The decision by Sweden to question Assange in the embassy after years of dismissing his offers to be interviewed was announced in a statement Thursday by Ecuador's Attorney General Diego García Carrión. He said, “In the coming weeks a date will be established for the proceedings to be held at the embassy of Ecuador in the United Kingdom... For more than four years, the government of Ecuador has offered to cooperate in facilitating the questioning of Julian Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, as well as proposing other political and legal measures, in order

to reach a satisfactory solution for all parties involved in the legal case against Julian Assange, to end the unnecessary delays in the process and to ensure full and effective legal protection.

“In line with this position, Ecuador proposed to Sweden the negotiation of an agreement on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, which was signed last December and which provides the legal framework for the questioning.”

The attorney general said that the questioning did not invalidate the findings of the UN Working Group, insisting, “Ecuador's foreign ministry reiterates its commitment to the asylum granted to Julian Assange in August 2012, and reaffirms that the protection afforded by the Ecuadorian state shall continue while the circumstances persist that led to the granting of asylum, namely fears of political persecution.”

On Friday, Swedish prosecution authority spokeswoman Karin Rosander said Ecuador's reply “means that a questioning can make the case go forward. This is decisive to be able to take a decision whether to formally charge him or not.”

Assange's persecution originates in the response of the Obama administration to the publication by WikiLeaks in 2010 of hundreds of thousands of secret documents relating to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan leaked by Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning, including the infamous “Collateral Murder” video. Pressure was put on US allies, including Sweden, which had been a centre of WikiLeaks operations, to do whatever they could to counteract Assange's activities.

In Sweden, the authorities seized on the occasion earlier in 2010 when two women, who had consenting sexual relationships with Assange, visited a Stockholm police station to request he take an HIV test.

Swedish prosecutors then alleged that Assange,

without charging him, had committed a number of sexual misconduct offenses. When Stockholm's chief prosecutor declared there was no evidence of rape, another prosecutor, Marianne Ny, resurrected the case, at the behest of a right-wing Social Democrat, Claes Borgstrom.

In December 2010, Sweden issued a European Arrest Warrant, requesting that the UK, where Assange was living, arrest and extradite him. After two years of court battles, house arrest and several days in jail, Assange, still not charged with any offense, entered the Ecuadorian embassy in June 2012, where he has remained to this day.

Since then, Ny has insisted that Assange had to return to Sweden to be questioned, even though the Swedish authorities have interviewed dozens of people in the UK over the last five years and transferred an entire Stockholm court to Rwanda for war crimes proceedings in 2012.

Following the UN Working Group's ruling, Assange's attorneys asked the Stockholm District Court this February to overturn the EAW. The court refused, claiming Assange's "stay" at the Ecuadorian Embassy was not a form of detention and that "there is still probable cause for the suspicion against [Assange] for rape, less serious incident, and that there is still a risk that he will depart or in some other way evade prosecution or penalty." Assange's lawyers are appealing the decision.

Five hundred human rights organisations, activists, Nobel laureates and diplomats have condemned the Swedish and British rejection of the UNWGAD ruling in an open letter.

Speaking in a live video feed Saturday from the embassy to an event at the Australian Bendigo Writers Festival, Assange said of Sweden's move, "The situation is this, there is one allegation, there are no charges, there have never been charges. In relation to this precise allegation, I have already been cleared by the chief prosecutor of Stockholm, back in 2010, who found that no crime had been committed whatsoever. It's been at the stage of preliminary investigation ever since."

Asked by the interviewer, Professor Robert Manne, if he believed he would go free if Sweden stopped their persecution, Assange replied, "I'm 100 percent confident that I would not be a free person because the

British government has said, regardless of whether the Swedes drop the case or not, they're going to arrest me. The UK government also refuses to confirm or deny whether there is already a US extradition request."

Backing up the extent of the intimate relationship between Sweden's political and judicial authorities and successive US governments, Assange told the audience, "The Swedes have extradited every single person that the US has asked for since at least the year 2000. They have a 100 percent extradition rate to the United States. The UK has a 90 percent extradition rate."

Assange concluded, "We have the United States asserting jurisdiction over an Australian not in the United States, asserting jurisdiction over web servers and publishing operations in Europe and Australia."

The *Sydney Morning Herald*, no friend of Assange, was forced to acknowledge that "the packed Ulumbarra Theatre crowd was largely sympathetic [to Assange], delivering rousing applause at various points in the discussion."

Efforts to railroad Assange are being intensified following WikiLeaks' release of roughly 20,000 internal Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails, exposing the methods that the Democratic Party utilizes in order to raise funds, dole out privileges and cover up their dirty dealings.

Most significantly, the emails revealed how the DNC worked to undermine the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and assist the campaign of Hillary Clinton. Last week WikiLeaks tweeted a reminder that in 2010, Bob Beckel, a strategist for the Democratic Party, called for Julian Assange to be assassinated.



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