

Swedish authorities finally question Julian Assange after six years

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15 November 2016

On Monday morning, Sweden's deputy chief prosecutor Ingrid Isgren arrived at the Ecuadorean Embassy in London to question WikiLeaks founder and editor Julian Assange.

Isgren interviewed Assange in relation to bogus "minor rape" allegations. The interrogation is expected to last up to three days. This is the first time Swedish prosecutors have questioned Assange regarding the allegations, despite having every opportunity to do so since December 2010.

Swedish director of public prosecutions Marianne Ny insisted for years that Assange return to Sweden to be questioned even though the Swedish authorities have interviewed dozens of people in the UK over the last five years—even transferring an entire Stockholm court to Rwanda for war crimes proceedings in 2012.

Ny maintained, with no evidence, that having to conduct the questioning of Assange outside of Sweden would, as her spokeswoman said recently, "affect the quality of the interview."

There is nothing impartial in what Assange's Swedish prosecutors are up to. The *Guardian* noted yesterday, "Sources close to the Swedish investigation told the *Guardian* that a further reason for Ny's insistence on interviewing Assange in Sweden was she was confident that she could secure an indictment and would therefore be able to arrest and charge Assange immediately."

Speaking to the BBC, Assange's lawyer Jennifer Robinson said were he to go to Sweden, he risked, as the United Nations' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) also pointed out, losing his Ecuadorean asylum status. She added, "Sweden refused to provide assurances against onward extradition to the United States."

Assange correctly fears that once in Sweden, he

would be extradited to the US where a grand jury, empanelled by the Obama administration in 2010, is ready to bring a sealed indictment against him.

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. 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.

The British state is intimately involved in the frame-up of Assange and has instructed police to arrest him the moment he sets foot outside the Ecuadorean Embassy.

More than six years have passed since Assange was in Sweden, during a trip in which the offences are alleged to have been committed. At the time, Assange freely presented himself to the police and was found to have nothing to answer for. A leading prosecutor threw out the allegations as unsound before Swedish authorities resuscitated them later, in 2010.

In December 2010, Assange was detained in London under an arbitrary European Arrest Warrant (EAW). He has been in detention ever since—in prison and then under house arrest. For the last four years, Assange has remained in the Ecuadorean Embassy, which granted him diplomatic asylum in June 2012, after he was denied his basic democratic rights at the hands of the British legal system. In the embassy, Assange is confined to a tiny room and has no access to sunlight, with his health declining as a result. He has been denied access to basic health care.

Assange suffers this intolerable situation despite, to this day, never having been charged by Sweden with a single crime. Indeed, he has been incarcerated for so

long that last year Sweden was forced to drop three of four of the allegations because a five-year statute of limitations expired.

Under the provisions of international legal assistance and the agreement reached by Sweden and Ecuador, the questioning session is being attended by Isgren and Swedish police inspector Cecilia Redell. However, the interrogation is being conducted by an Ecuadorean prosecutor who is asking Assange questions already submitted by Sweden. Isgren and Redell are allowed to ask for clarification of Assange's responses. They will not be allowed any follow-up questions. It is reported that, subject to Assange's agreement, the investigators intend to take a DNA sample.

According to reports, Assange's Swedish lawyer, Per Samuelson, who was not allowed to be present at the interrogation, had concerns about the interview having to be translated into Swedish, saying this could lead to misunderstandings. He added that the interview "seems to be the only way to bring the case forward and we demand that the pre-investigation is dropped immediately thereafter."

Assange's answers will be transcribed and sent to the Swedish authorities. The Press Association said a statement on behalf of the Swedish prosecutors noted that the investigation would remain confidential. It reported, "Therefore, the prosecutors cannot provide information concerning details of the investigation after the interview."

The Swedish authorities, in league with those in Britain and the United States, are blatantly flouting international law in their vindictive pursuit of Assange. In May, a Swedish court reaffirmed the EAW and explicitly rejected the conclusion UNWGAD that Assange has been arbitrarily detained, in violation of international human rights conventions.

In September, the Swedish Appeal Court upheld the EAW against Assange.

So vindictive are the Swedish authorities towards Assange that last month he was even denied the right to attend the funeral of WikiLeaks director Gavin MacFadyen. MacFadyen, a US journalist, died in London on October 22. Assange described the decision as "callous."

The US Democratic Party has been at the forefront of attacks on WikiLeaks and Assange, even claiming that he is an ally of the Russian regime of Vladimir Putin

and a stooge of President-elect Donald Trump.

Assange and WikiLeaks are being slandered in order to conceal the devastating indictment of the Democrats contained in WikiLeaks' release of thousands of internal Democratic National Committee (DNC) e-mails. These exposed the methods that the Democratic Party utilises to raise funds, dole out privileges and cover up its dirty dealings.

The camp of defeated Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton sought to deflect any questions regarding the support and assurances she gave to Wall Street bankers or the corrupt operations of her campaign, as revealed in the e-mail, by claiming, with no evidence whatsoever, that the material released by WikiLeaks had been hacked by the Russian government and therefore could not be trusted.

In October, in a blatant attempt to silence WikiLeaks, Assange had his Internet connection in the embassy cut off. The Foreign Ministry of Ecuador confirmed WikiLeaks' charge that Ecuador had ordered the severing of Assange's Internet connection, under pressure from the US government.



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