

Julian Assange challenges warrant for his arrest as doctors confirm worsening of his health

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WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has asked a UK court to relinquish the arrest warrant that is keeping him confined to the Ecuadorian Embassy in Knightsbridge, London. If granted, he would be free to leave without fear of arrest, according to a spokesman for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

“Hypothetically, yes. That would be our interpretation,” he said. Assange would then be able to seek the medical treatment he urgently needs.

First arrested in London in December 2010 under anti-democratic provisions of a European Arrest Warrant (EAW) issued by the Swedish authorities, Assange was never charged with any crime and was only required to return to Sweden in order to answer questions regarding trumped up allegations of sexual misconduct. He skipped bail to avoid extradition to Sweden—after being denied elementary democratic rights by the British legal system—seeking asylum in the Embassy in 2012.

Assange feared the Swedish authorities would immediately extradite him to the United States, which has conducted a cruel vendetta against him since WikiLeaks exposed criminal actions taken by the US during the wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan. This included a video WikiLeaks posted on the Internet showing the 2007 “collateral murder” of 12 Iraqi civilians from the viewpoint of an Apache helicopter’s gun-sight.

The US administration has kept live a grand jury empowered in 2010 to bring secret, unspecified charges against Assange that could carry the death penalty.

On Friday, Westminster Magistrates’ Court were told by Mark Summers QC that because the Swedish case had been dropped, the European Arrest Warrant had “lost its purpose and its function.” Assange should be

able to leave the embassy without fear of arrest or extradition.

Swedish authorities closed the case against Assange last year, only demonstrating it was a frame-up in the first place. The statute of limitations on some of the allegations, however, does not expire until 2020.

For more than five and a half years, Assange has been confined to a small, windowless room, 15 feet by 13, without access to sunlight, fresh air or exercise.

As Assange said in 2014, “The United Nations minimum standard for prisoners is one hour a day of outside exercise. Even when I was in Wandsworth prison in solitary confinement [in 2010], that was respected.”

Even though Assange has been given an Ecuadorian passport and ID, the British authorities have vindictively refused to grant him safe passage out of the country. The UK have acted in violation of international law according to a United Nations panel, which in 2016 declared Assange to be a victim of “arbitrary detention.”

Assange’s physical and psychological health has been severely compromised due to his confinement. By as early as 2014, Assange was suffering health problems. In an article for the *Daily Mail*, journalist Sarah Oliver described Assange’s appearance: “His usually pale skin is now almost translucent and on his face it is so puffy it looks as if it is lifting off his naturally sharp cheekbones. He has a chronic cough, which the installation of a humidifier to moisten the dry, air-conditioned atmosphere has done little to ease. His eyes have navy pools of shadow beneath them, suggesting that he’s shifted from nocturnal to sleep-deprived.”

She continued, “Assange is, according to a WikiLeaks source, suffering from the potentially life-threatening heart condition arrhythmia and has a chronic lung complaint and dangerously high blood pressure.”

Of the conditions in his living quarters, Assange told her, “I can’t even keep a pot plant alive for long in here.”

The UK government refused an earlier demand in 2015 for Assange to access hospital treatment without the threat of arrest.

Last October, Dr. Sondra Crosby, an associate professor at the Boston University’s school of medicine and public health, and Dr. Brock Chisholm, a London-based consultant clinical psychologist, entered the Embassy to examine Assange. In a letter they co-authored with Dr. Sean Love to the *Guardian* January 24 they write, “As clinicians with a combined experience of four decades caring for and about refugees and other traumatised populations, we recently spent 20 hours, over three days, performing a comprehensive physical and psychological evaluation of Mr. Assange ... it is our professional opinion that his continued confinement is dangerous physically and mentally to him and a clear infringement of his human right to healthcare.”

Though unable to go into specific details for reasons of confidentiality, the letter explains, “Experience tells us that the prolonged uncertainty of indefinite detention inflicts profound psychological and physical trauma above and beyond the expected stressors of incarceration. These can include severe anxiety, pathological levels of stress, dissociation, depression, suicidal thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic pain, among others.”

Assange is thought to be suffering from a serious shoulder issue requiring an MRI scan, impossible to organise inside the embassy. He is also said to have a lung problem. Clinicians who are prepared to visit Assange are severely handicapped in the care they can provide, because “At the embassy, there are none of the diagnostic tests, treatments and procedures that ... he needs urgently.”

The letter continues, “It is unconscionable that Mr. Assange is in the position of having to decide between avoiding arrest and potentially suffering the health consequences, including death, if a life-threatening

crisis such as a heart attack were to occur.”

The letter concludes by calling on the British Medical Association and UK clinicians to demand that Assange is granted safe access to medical care and that they oppose the “ongoing violations of his human right to healthcare.”

The demand to end the state persecution of Assange must be adopted by the international working class. His vilification and victimisation is part and parcel of government attacks on basic democratic rights, exemplified by Google and social media censorship of left-wing, anti-war and progressive websites and the attempt to portray opposition to government austerity and war policies as foreign interference.

In urging the formation of an International Coalition of Socialist, Antiwar and Progressive Websites, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International urged as one of a specific set of principles that must be fought for: “Demanding the end to the persecution of Julian Assange and Edward Snowden and the complete restoration of their personal freedom.”



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