

Support global rallies today to demand freedom for Julian Assange

Mike Head
19 June 2018

Vigils and demonstrations are being held in many cities around the world today in defence of WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange, who remains effectively jailed inside Ecuador's London embassy, and in grave danger of being handed over to British and US authorities.

As the result of a deepening international campaign for Assange's freedom, rallies are being held in London, outside the Ecuadorian embassy, and globally, from New Zealand and Australia, to Sri Lanka and India, across Europe and in many US cities, including Washington DC.

This follows a rally in Sydney on Sunday, organised by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) (Australia), to demand that the Australian government intervene to protect Assange, an Australian citizen, and guarantee his right to return home and his freedom from being extradited to the US.

Assange was granted political asylum by Ecuador six years ago today, on June 19, 2012, to protect him from being extradited to the United States to face lengthy imprisonment, and possibly the death penalty. But the British government has insisted that if he steps outside the embassy, he will be arrested.

SEP (UK) assistant national secretary Julie Hyland, who is one of the speakers at today's London embassy vigil, has issued an appeal for workers and youth to attend. She called on them to demand that the British government end its vindictive persecution of Assange and allow him to leave the embassy and, if he chooses, to leave the UK without fear of arrest or interference.

Hyland said: "The vigils being held across the world in solidarity with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange are of immense importance.

"Today marks exactly six years since Assange was forced to take refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London to prevent plans for his extradition to the US to face charges of espionage, which carries the death penalty.

"He remains trapped in the embassy despite Sweden dropping the trumped-up allegations of sexual assault against him more than one year ago. Yet only in February a British judge stated that Assange faces arrest for breaching

bail conditions if he tries to leave the building. This threat was made just one day after the US Justice Department confirmed that it is still seeking his extradition.

"For almost three months now, Assange has been denied contact with the outside world, save his lawyers. He cannot speak to his family, and is unable to receive visitors, make phone calls or access the Internet.

"There is the real and imminent danger that this is the prelude to his expulsion from the embassy as part of Ecuador's attempted rapprochement with Washington.

"Assange is being punished because he is someone all too rare these days—a journalist who tells the truth and courageously exposes the war crimes and corruption of governments, giant corporations and other powerful organisations."

Vigils have already taken place today in Melbourne, Australia and in Wellington, New Zealand. Vigils will be held shortly in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital, and in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The Sri Lankan protest will be streamed live on Facebook here, and the Indian event here.

Speaking at the Melbourne demonstration, SEP (Australia) National Secretary James Cogan said the demonstrations being held around the world had to be a "launching pad" for "a renewed and determined struggle to win Assange's freedom and defend all democratic rights."

Addressing a crowd of about 75 people outside the British consulate, Cogan condemned successive Australian governments, starting with the Gillard Labor government, for backing the US moves against Assange.

Cogan emphasised that the WikiLeaks editor's defence could not be based on appeals to the governments, media outlets and other organisations that had abandoned him, but on "the independent political mobilisation of the working class."

Over the past year, the Trump administration has escalated the threat to Assange because WikiLeaks has continued to expose the computer hacking and cyber warfare operations of the CIA.

White House officials have declared it a "priority" to place

Assange on trial on espionage and conspiracy charges for publishing secret documents telling the world the truth about war crimes, regime-change operations and mass surveillance being conducted by the US and its allies internationally.

Almost three months ago, Ecuador's government, which is seeking closer relations with Washington, intensified the pressure on Assange. It cut off all his communications with the outside world, and all visits, except from his legal representatives.

Yesterday, Jennifer Robinson, a lawyer for Assange, was permitted to make a brief statement to the current UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva. She urged the UN to send a special rapporteur to visit Assange to see the "severe impact" on his physical and mental health of his confinement inside the embassy for the past six years, denied sunlight or outdoor access.

Robinson told the meeting the British authorities had made it clear that if Assange leaves the embassy to seek medical treatment he will be arrested. "He cannot leave the embassy because the UK will not provide assurances against extradition to the US," she said.

"The UK is showing deliberate disregard for his medical needs by asking him to choose between his human right to asylum and his human right to medical treatment. No-one should have to make that choice."

Robinson reminded the council that in 2016 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that Assange was being arbitrarily detained. The UN agency called on the Swedish and British authorities to end his "deprivation of liberty, respect his physical integrity and freedom of movement, and afford him the right to compensation."

Robinson visited Assange on June 7 with representatives from the Australian High Commission in London—the first visit by Australian officials in the six years he has been stuck in Ecuador's embassy. But there has been no announcement of any intervention by the government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Robinson's statement and the ongoing official silence make all the more critical and urgent the development of the campaign for Assange's defence.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges its readers internationally to join today's demonstrations to demand Assange's immediate release from involuntary confinement in London. The International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist party, will continue to develop and extend the fight for his freedom, and to mobilise the vast social power of the international working class against the capitalist system in defence of fundamental social and democratic rights.

London, UK

June 19, 6-8 p.m.

Ecuadorian Embassy, No 3 Hans Crescent, Knightsbridge
Speakers will include SEP (UK) Assistant National Secretary Julie Hyland
Facebook Page

Tamil Nadu, India

June 19, 5 p.m.

Sriperumbudur Bus Terminal

Colombo, Sri Lanka

June 19, 4 p.m.

Fort Railway Station in central Colombo

Los Angeles, California

June 19, 2-8 p.m.

UK and Australian Consulate, 2029 Century Park East

Facebook Page

New York, New York

June 19, 2-8 p.m.

UK Consulate, 845 Third Ave, between 51st and 52nd in Manhattan

San Diego, California

June 19, 4-7 p.m.

Balboa Park by Lily Pond

Washington, DC

June 19, 11 a.m.

Lafayette Park opposite the White House

Washington, DC

June 19, 2-8 p.m.

British Embassy, 3100 Massachusetts Ave, NW

Facebook Page

More events are listed on this page.



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