Ecuadorian foreign minister warns that Julian Assange's political asylum is "not forever"

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Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Jose Valencia said on Wednesday his government was "reviewing" Julian Assange's "situation" in discussion with the British authorities.

In comments televised on Ecuavisa, one of the country's largest broadcasting corporations, Valencia declared that the WikiLeaks editor's political asylum in Ecuador's London embassy would not last "forever."

Valencia's statements are the latest public indication of a conspiracy, involving the British, US and Ecuadorian governments, to force Assange out of the embassy, where he was granted asylum six years ago.

The US and its allies are determined to prosecute Assange for his role in exposing their war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and internationally, and for bringing to light the daily diplomatic intrigues of the major powers around the world.

To that end, the British and US governments have placed immense pressure on the Ecuadorian administration of President Lenín Moreno to revoke Assange's asylum and create conditions that will compel him to leave the embassy.

Referring to Assange, Valencia stated: "Ecuador has been looking for a solution to this problem. In principle, asylum is not eternal. You cannot think of an asylum that lasts for years, which is not, at a certain point, reviewed, including because it violates the rights of the refugee."

Valencia's statements have far-reaching implications, effectively transforming political asylum from a fundamental right enshrined in international law, to something that can be granted and revoked by governments, depending on immediate political expediency.

Throughout the 20th century, countless political figures and journalists were forced to seek asylum, sometimes lasting decades. The duration of their asylum was determined by their ongoing persecution. The politically-motivated persecution of Assange, that was the basis for the previous Ecuadorian government's decision to grant him asylum, has not abated, but has dramatically intensified.

Valencia's claim that his government is "reviewing" Assange's asylum out of concern for the rights of the WikiLeaks editor, does not hold water. The Moreno government has already violated fundamental principles of political asylum. Assange's conditions within the embassy increasingly resemble those of a prisoner.

On March 28, the Moreno regime cut off Assange's access to the outside world, severing his internet connection and banning him from receiving any visitors, aside from his legal team.

The total isolation of Assange was enforced after the newly-elected Moreno government expanded Ecuador's military and economic ties to the US. It followed denunciations of the WikiLeaks editor by Moreno, as an "inherited problem" and a "hacker." Moreno later outlined a novel conception of asylum, in which Assange's presence in the embassy is conditional on the WikiLeaks editor refraining from making any political statements.

This week, the watchdog group Human Rights Watch revealed that Ecuadorian authorities had denied it access to Assange to discuss his situation and check on his health. The report followed mounting warnings from Assange's legal team that his medical condition is deteriorating.

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On Wednesday, Jennifer Robinson, one of Assange's lawyers, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation his six-year confinement in the embassy, without sunlight or adequate medical care, "had an extreme and likely permanent impact on his physical and mental health." She warned that Assange was in "terrible circumstances" and "it remains to be seen how long that can go on."

On Monday, addressing a United Nations Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva, Robinson condemned the British government's repeated declarations that the WikiLeaks editor will be arrested if he leaves the embassy. Theresa May's government has refused to provide a guarantee that Assange will not be extradited to the US, where he faces possible espionage charges that carry the death penalty as a maximum sentence.

Valencia's comments point to close coordination with May's government. He said: "What we will seek and insist on is a solution to the problem that Mr. Assange faces, and for which reason it led him to be isolated, in conversation with the English authorities."

Valencia's statement demonstrates the grave dangers confronting the WikiLeaks editor. The British authorities have made clear that the only "solution" they will accept is Assange's imprisonment in a UK jail, where he will face the danger of extradition to the US.

Assange's dire plight underscores the critical importance of the renewed campaign for his freedom, which is being given a lead by the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Parties around the world.

Last Sunday, hundreds of workers and young people attended a rally called by the Socialist Equality Party in Sydney to demand that the Australian government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull take immediate action to secure Assange's release and return to Australia, with a guarantee that he will not be extradited to the US.

Vigils and pickets marking six years of Assange's confinement in the embassy were held on Tuesday in London, and in cities across the US, Australia, New Zealand, India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

The public support for the WikiLeaks editor has been subjected to an almost complete media blackout. There was no print or television coverage of the Sydney rally in the establishment press in Australia, or internationally.

World-renowned investigative journalist John Pilger, who spoke at the Sydney demonstration, condemned the "Vichy journalists" who have prosecuted a media campaign against Assange.

All the parliamentary parties in Britain and Australia have openly or tacitly backed the assault on Assange, along with a range of "left-liberal" and pseudo-left organisations that have abandoned him.

This demonstrates that the urgent defence of Assange, as part of the fight against war and the evisceration of civil liberties, requires the mobilisation of the working class and youth.

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