Ecuador refuses to give assurance of Julian Assange's political asylum rights

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In another indication of the grave danger facing WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange, Ecuador's Foreign Ministry has reportedly failed to reply to two letters from his legal team asking for assurances about his fate.

Over the past week, credible reports have been published that Assange could be evicted soon from Ecuador's London embassy. He was granted political asylum there in 2012 to protect him from being extradited to the US to face espionage-related charges that could lead to life imprisonment or the death penalty.

One of Assange's lawyers, Carlos Poveda, told the *Sputnik* news site on July 24: "We sent two letters to the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry 10 days ago and five days ago respectively and expressed concern about the issue of refusal to grant asylum [to Assange] and we have received no response."

According to the lawyer, if Ecuador revokes Assange's asylum, the WikiLeaks founder should have an opportunity to meet with government representatives and obtain information about a possible extradition to a third country.

Ecuador's apparent refusal to affirm the fundamental right of asylum under international law is a further warning that, as previously reported, the Ecuadorian government is engaged in secretive discussions with the British and American governments on plans to hand Assange over to them.

Poveda said Ecuador's Foreign Ministry also failed to reply to a request for Assange's representatives to meet with the country's President Lenin Moreno, who has been in Britain this week, ostensibly to address a global disability summit. "It seems that [Ecuador] is not willing to do so," Poveda told *Sputnik*.

Earlier this week, the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry denied that Moreno would discuss Assange's fate with British authorities. The denial came after a number of reports that Moreno would, in fact, hold talks with British ministers to finalise an agreement to remove Assange from the embassy.

If Assange leaves the embassy, he will be arrested immediately by the British police, supposedly for breaching bail six years ago when he sought asylum. Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt last week gloated that Assange would get a "warm welcome" from the British police and face "serious charges."

Prime Minister Theresa May's government has refused to abandon the bail proceedings against Assange, even though the Swedish authorities last year finally dropped the underlying European arrest warrant against him for questioning about trumped-up sexual assault allegations.

As the WSWS reported this week, Assange would be imprisoned by the British authorities, perhaps for two years or more, pending extradition to the US, where Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Attorney General Jeff Sessions have both stated their determination to prosecute Assange and permanently silence him.

The WikiLeaks editor has become the world's foremost political prisoner. He has spent more than six years effectively trapped and constantly monitored inside Ecuador's embassy, and been cut off all communications with the outside world, including his own mother, since March 28.

Assange has not been charged with a single crime. The only "serious charges" he could face are in the US. He is being incarcerated because the ruling elite in Washington and its allies fear the impact of his media organisation's ongoing exposures of their mass surveillance, anti-democratic machinations and war crimes.

Assange's mother, Christine, this week issued a call,

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through an interview with the WSWS, for people to take a stand against the persecution of her son and the wider threat to political freedom.

"We are working towards becoming a totalitarian state, 1984 is here," she warned. "If you don't fight it now then you will suffer under it. Julian is in the forefront of this—he's the number one target at the moment and he's the one we have to stand up for. I say this, not just as a mother, but as a citizen and someone who believes in democracy and freedom. We have to fight because if they take him, they can take anyone and they will take anyone. We have to do this en masse and in this way we can hold back the forces of oppression."

Christine Assange also warned against any reliance on governments, the political establishment, the corporate media and the ex-"left" and liberal layers who previously professed support for the defence of her son but then lined up behind the forces seeking to silence him and WikiLeaks.

"People have to de-lineate between the genuine traditional left who stand up for the rights and living standards of the common people, and the so-called liberal left or pseudo-left who are only interested in their individual concerns and privileges," she said.

Protests are being organised around the world to respond if and when Assange is evicted from the London embassy. Click here for details. The WSWS endorses such demonstrations and urges its readers to participate. Such action, however, will be just the beginning of a protracted campaign to defend Assange and oppose the increasing censorship of critical voices and independent media on the Internet.

Evidently nervous about evicting Assange in blatant violation of international law, Ecuador's Foreign Minister Jose Valencia told Spain's *ABC* newspaper on Thursday that Ecuador "has been very clear" on Assange's asylum status.

"It is an issue that should be dealt with in the framework of international law by three parties: the British government, the Ecuadorian government and Assange's lawyers," Valencia said. It was "difficult to predict how long it will take to find a solution," he said, indicating that such discussions are indeed underway.

While publicly downplaying reports of Assange being removed within days, Valencia reiterated his recent declarations that asylum is not "eternal." He also defended cutting off Assange's communications with the outside world, insisting it was not censorship.

"Ecuador granted Assange asylum on the basis of agreements providing him with protection by our country," Valencia stated. "These conventions determine that the person seeking asylum cannot make political pronouncements or put the host country's relationship with third parties (in this case Spain) at risk."

This is a pretext for justifying throwing Assange to the wolves after he made a telling criticism of the previous Spanish government's authoritarian imprisonment and extradition proceedings against ousted Catalan government leaders. The "third parties" no doubt includes the US, with which Moreno's government has been seeking a rapprochement.

The moves against Assange are possible only because the British Labour Party opposition headed by Jeremy Corbyn has refused to oppose the May government's threats, let alone demand that Assange be given a guarantee against US extradition.

Equally responsible are the Australian government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the country's Labor Party opposition, which have maintained their collaboration with the US against Assange, an Australian citizen. This is in defiance of a globally broadcast rally conducted by the Socialist Equality Party of Australia, with the support of well-known investigative journalist John Pilger, in Sydney's Town Hall Square on June 17. That rally demanded that the Australian government secure Assange's right to return to Australia, if he so wishes, with guarantees that he not be extradited to the US.

Assange's fate depends on workers and young people everywhere demanding his immediate freedom, as a central part of the fight to defend fundamental democratic rights, against all the capitalist governments, pro-imperialist parties, trade unions and media organisations that have lined up against him.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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