

Julian Assange takes legal action against Ecuadorian government

James Cogan
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Lawyers have filed a lawsuit in Quito, Ecuador seeking a ruling against the threat by the Ecuadorian government that it will renege on its political asylum for WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, and evict him from its embassy in London, unless he meets harsh new terms and conditions outlined in a so-called “Special Protocol.”

The intensified persecution of Assange comes after nearly seven months during which Ecuador has prevented him from having visitors apart from his legal representatives and denied him his right to communication via Internet or phone, even with his children and parents. Assange has now been confined inside the small embassy, without access to direct sunlight, for over six years.

The British government has threatened to arrest him if he steps outside the embassy and has refused to give a guarantee that he will not be extradited to the US. American authorities have relentlessly pursued Assange for his leading and courageous role in WikiLeaks’ publication of information that has exposed US war crimes, abuses of power, intelligence agency spying and conspiracies, diplomatic intrigues and official corruption.

Ecuador, which provided Assange with asylum on June 19, 2012, turned against him after current president Lenín Moreno took office in 2017. As part of his venal efforts to restore relations with the US, Moreno ordered that all Assange’s communications be cut off on March 28 to prevent him publicly opposing the anti-democratic actions of the US and other governments. Assange was silenced one day after top-level meetings between Ecuadorian and American military commanders and officials.

WikiLeaks’ lawyer Baltasar Garzon gave a press conference in Spanish in Quito on October 19 to

announce the law suit against Moreno’s government. An English language press release issued by WikiLeaks the same day detailed the scope of the draconian new conditions to be imposed on Assange:

“The protocol makes Assange’s political asylum contingent on censoring his freedom of opinion, speech and association. The protocol also requires journalists, his lawyers and anyone else seeking to see Julian Assange to disclose private or political details such as their social media usernames, the serial numbers and IMEI codes of their phones and tablets to Ecuador—which the protocol says the government may ‘share with other agencies.’ The protocol claims the embassy may seize the property of Mr Assange or his visitors, and, without a warrant, hand it over to UK authorities.”

Assange will have to pay for his own costs, including food and internet usage. The protocol stipulates that he undergo a medical examination every three months, at his own expense, and states that doctors can recommend that he be sent out of the embassy if they conclude that he requires urgent treatment. Due to his inability to safely receive adequate care, Assange has well-documented shoulder problems and dental issues, and is suffering the consequences of being denied sunlight and fresh air for so long.

On these terms, Ecuador has offered to continue to provide asylum and partially restore Assange’s ability to communicate on December 1, but on the condition that he does not express any view that the Moreno government deems to be “interference” in any other country’s “political matters.” In other words, a journalist and the publisher of a ground-breaking media organisation who was forced to seek political asylum will be effectively banned from expressing any opinion about any government in the world. If he does, he will

be handed over to his persecutors. The conditions also imply that all his communications, even private, would be monitored, recorded and shared with US, British and other intelligence-police agencies.

The Ecuadorian government has imposed these terms to manufacture a pretext to evict Assange. At the same time, efforts are underway to strip Assange—an Australian citizen—of the dual Ecuadorian citizenship he was granted by the former government.

These actions are a clear response to stepped-up demands from the US establishment that Ecuador hand Assange over. Last week, congressional Democrat Eliot Engel and Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen issued a bipartisan letter to Moreno labelling Assange as a “dangerous criminal and a threat to global security” who “should be brought to justice.” The letter asserted: “On numerous occasions, Mr. Assange has compromised the national security of the United States. He has done so by publicly releasing classified government documents along with confidential materials from individuals connected to our country’s 2016 presidential election.” It linked closer relations with the US to evicting the WikiLeaks founder from the London embassy.

The investigation by Special Counsel and former FBI director Robert Mueller into alleged “collusion” with “Russian meddling” in the 2016 election has sought to implicate WikiLeaks and Assange in the unsubstantiated claims that Hillary Clinton lost to Donald Trump because of a nefarious plot organised in Moscow.

The purported evidence of WikiLeaks colluding with Russian intelligence is its publication of emails sent by the Democratic National Committee. It began publishing the DNC emails on July 22, 2016—on the eve of the Democratic Party convention, exposing the fact that the Clinton camp had sought to undermine the campaign of Bernie Sanders in the primary elections.

Facing outrage among the millions of people who had supported Sanders as a “left” candidate against Clinton, top DNC officials were forced to resign in disgrace over their attempt to manipulate the outcome. Later, in October 2016, WikiLeaks also published emails leaked from Clinton campaign director John Podesta, which shed further light on the right-wing, militarist character of her policies and campaign.

WikiLeaks does not reveal its sources, but Assange

publicly stated that the DNC and Podesta leaks did not come from hackers working for Russian intelligence. He first revealed that WikiLeaks had information on the Clinton campaign in a media interview on June 12, 2016—well over one month before it was sent an email by a dubious hacker Guccifer 2.0 on July 14 purportedly offering access to an archive of Democratic Party emails. Former British whistleblower Craig Murray has stated he was informed that the data published by WikiLeaks had been provided to it earlier by disgruntled DNC employees who were outraged by the anti-democratic actions of its leadership and the Clinton campaign.

The Mueller investigation has nevertheless pursued the allegation that WikiLeaks conspired with Russian intelligence agents working for the Trump campaign to obtain and publish the information that damaged Clinton. The final report, expected to be released after the November 6 mid-term congressional election, may provide the pretext to seek Assange’s extradition.

The persecution of Julian Assange is one of the most egregious examples of burgeoning censorship of the Internet and efforts to silence all independent and critical media. Defenders of democratic rights and freedom of speech must use all available forums to demand his immediate and unconditional freedom and expose the myriad slander and lies that are being continually spread about the WikiLeaks publisher.



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