Julian Assange denounces his illegal detention in Ecuadorian embassy

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WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange spoke out against the repressive conditions that have been imposed upon him in Ecuador's London embassy and the ongoing efforts to force him into British and US custody at a court hearing on Wednesday.

Assange gave evidence from the embassy via video link, in a case brought by WikiLeaks against a "Special Protocol" presented by the South American nation in October. It places further onerous conditions on Assange, following the cutting off of his internet access and other communications, and a ban on all visitors aside from his legal team in March.

The protocol forbids the WikiLeaks publisher from making any political statements. It requires that he undergo a medical examination every three months. In a bid to exploit Assange's deteriorating health to force him out of the embassy, it empowers doctors to recommend that he be "evacuated" from the building if he fails the exam. Assange was compelled to undertake the first series of medical tests this week, with doctors selected by WikiLeaks.

Assange's appearance in the video link indicated the deterioration of his health. He warned that his ongoing detention and the conditions in the protocol had created "a situation that will inevitably lead to a health crisis for me, resulting in my death or hospitalisation or a political excuse to illegally hand me over to the British, and therefore to the United States, where I face a potential life sentence."

Assange has been confined to tiny living quarters in the embassy for more than six years, since he was granted political asylum by Ecuador in 2012. He has been deprived of sunlight and doctors have repeatedly stated that he requires urgent medical treatment, which cannot be provided within the embassy.

Assange's confinement is the immediate result of the actions of the British government, which has made clear that he will be arrested immediately if he leaves the building on trumped up bail charges, stemming from a bogus Swedish investigation into sexual assault allegations which was dropped last year.

Assange denounced the collusion of Ecuadorian authorities with the British and US governments, which are determined to prosecute him for WikiLeaks' exposure of their war crimes, illegal diplomatic intrigues and mass surveillance.

He stated that Ecuador was conducting ongoing espionage against him and said it was likely turning over the material gathered to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which has played a central role in the US efforts to destroy WikiLeaks.

Assange condemned representatives of the Ecuadorian government for making "comments of a threatening nature" over his publishing activities. The WikiLeaks founder compared his treatment to the brutal murder of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi at the Middle-Eastern dictatorships' Istanbul embassy in October, noting that the attempts to silence him were merely "more subtle."

Comments by Ecuadorian representatives have underscored the imminent dangers facing Assange. Last week, *El Comercio* cited Ecuador's ambassador to London, Jaime Marchán, who lamented that the previous government's decision to grant Assange asylum had resulted in a "distancing" and "cooling" of the country's relationship with Britain.

Marchán, disregarding fundamental pillars of international law, declared: "The embassy is not an asylum camp, but a diplomatic mission that has a daily function to fulfill." He called on the WikiLeaks founder to turn himself over to British authorities, stating, "Assange should be the one to make the decision" to leave the embassy.

In comments to *El Comercio* yesterday, Ecuadorean Foreign Minister José Valencia stated that the "most

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convenient" option for Assange would be to "face British justice."

Ecuadorian authorities are well aware that if he leaves the embassy, Assange will be arrested and extradited to the United States, where he faces the prospect of life imprisonment. The country's top attorney, Inigo Salvador, blithely noted on Wednesday that Ecuador "cannot provide assurances to Mr. Assange that the UK will not hand him over to a third country that requests his extradition."

Last month, it was revealed that a federal grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia has returned a secret indictment of Assange, likely for WikiLeaks 2010 publication of leaked US war logs and diplomatic cables, exposing war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and diplomatic conspiracies around the world.

The Ecuadorian regime, in line with a shift to the right by governments throughout the region, including those which previously postured as "left," has expanded its relations with the US over the past year. Last June it hosted US Vice President Mike Pence. In November, Valencia met with the Trump administration's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Washington has clearly placed immense pressure on the South American nation to make conditions unbearable for Assange, in exchange for expanding economic and military ties, including major international loans to the government.

Underscoring the determination of the entire American establishment to get its hands on Assange, six leading Democrats, including the party's House leader Nancy Pelosi, issued a letter to Pompeo on Tuesday, asking whether he had pressed Valencia to "resolve" the "situation" of Assange, i.e., force him into US custody.

The letter repeated the bogus claims that WikiLeaks conspired with Russian military intelligence to "interfere" in the 2016 US presidential election.

In reality, WikiLeaks published leaked documents, whose authenticity has never been questioned, demonstrating that the Democratic National Committee sought to rig the party's primaries against Senator Bernie Sanders. WikiLeaks published secret speeches delivered by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Wall Street banks, in which she pledged to do their bidding and to escalate illegal US wars and regime-change operations.

Significantly, most of the Democratic Party letter consisted of a repetition of claims made by the British *Guardian* newspaper two weeks ago, that Assange met with American political lobbyist and consultant Paul Manafort at the Ecuadorian embassy in 2013, 2015 and early 2016.

The entirely unsubstantiated allegation was aimed at linking the WikiLeaks founder to Manafort, who later served as a Trump campaign advisor and has been a central target of a US Special Counsel investigation into purported collusion between Trump and the Russian government.

In the fortnight since the *Guardian* published the story, its claims have been completely discredited. The articles authors, including Luke Harding, who functions as a mouthpiece of the British intelligence agencies, and the publication's editor, Kath Viner, have provided no evidence for the allegations and have refused to comment on the story.

The Ecuadorian embassy is among the most surveilled locations on the planet. Moreover, visitor logs covering the period when Manafort supposedly visited the embassy have already been released by Ecuador. They do not contain his name.

The escalating campaign against Assange is an indictment of successive Australian governments, and the entire Australian political and media establishment, which has collaborated in the persecution of the Australian-born journalist.

The current Liberal-National Coalition government has refused to take any action to secure the freedom of Assange, following on from the actions of previous Labor governments, which branded WikiLeaks as a criminal organisation.

This underscores the necessity for workers and young people to come to Assange's defence, as part of the fight against expanding internet censorship, the erosion of democratic rights and the stepped-up drive to war. The Socialist Equality Party is holding a public meeting in Sydney this Sunday, which will be livestreamed to the world, to discuss the next steps in this crucial campaign.

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