

Demands surge for Britain to free WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange

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Demands are intensifying for WikiLeaks founder and Australian citizen Julian Assange to be immediately allowed to leave the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he sought political asylum on June 19, 2012.

Assange effectively has been imprisoned inside the small building for six-and-a-half years, with the British government threatening to arrest him if he leaves, followed by the prospect of being extradited to the United States to face a show trial on concocted charges of espionage or conspiracy.

Yesterday, legal experts who comprise the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) made a scathing condemnation of the British government. Its press release, issued by the UN Human Rights Commissioner, noted that the UN Working Group had ruled three years ago that Assange was being “arbitrarily deprived of his freedom and demanded that he be released.”

The only charge against Assange in Britain is that he breached bail conditions when he sought asylum. He applied for asylum because the British courts upheld a warrant for his extradition to Sweden, purportedly to answer questions over “suspicion” that he had committed sexual misconduct.

The allegations made against Assange in late 2010 were a manufactured frame-up. They had two transparent aims. Firstly, they were intended to slander and discredit Assange, under conditions in which WikiLeaks was publishing explosive information exposing US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the imperialist intrigues conducted by American embassies and consulates around the world. Secondly, the allegations were designed to have the courageous publisher imprisoned on false accusations, and then extradited to the US.

In December 2016, Swedish prosecutors and police

finally agreed to Assange’s offer to put their “questions” to him in the United Kingdom. In May 2017, Sweden abandoned both the arrest warrant and the “suspicions” without any charges ever being laid. The May government in Britain, however, refused to drop the police bail warrant and made clear that it intended to prosecute Assange if he left the embassy.

Michael Forst, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, endorsed WGAD’s press release which stated:

“The Swedish investigations have been closed for over 18 months now, and the only ground remaining for Mr. Assange’s continued deprivation of liberty is a bail violation in the UK, which is, objectively, a minor offense that cannot post facto justify the more than six years confinement that he has been subjected to since he sought asylum in the Embassy of Ecuador. Mr. Assange should be able to exercise his right to freedom of movement in an unhindered manner, in accordance with the human rights conventions the UK has ratified.”

The statement concluded: “It is time that Mr. Assange, who has already paid a high price for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of opinion, expression and information, and to promote the right to truth in the public interest, recovers his freedom.”

The day before the UN Working Group issued this demand, Assange’s father John Shipton visited the persecuted publisher for over an hour. Two members of the German parliament, Sevim Dagdelen and Heike Hansel, were also permitted to meet with Assange.

The visits were among the only contact Assange has had with anyone, apart from his lawyers and embassy staff, for over eight months. The Ecuadorian government, under its current president Lenín Moreno, shifted from defending Assange to joining with the US

in persecuting the publisher. In March, in collaboration with the Trump administration, the embassy cut off all Assange's communication with the outside world and denied him access to visitors in order to pressure him to leave the embassy, to be detained by Britain.

After visiting his son, Shipton told the media it was "time for this torment to end." He noted: "His health is declining after years of ongoing stress, no sunlight and restricted access to visitors, no telecommunication, no telephone, no friends."

Dagdelen, a member of the German Left Party, stated: "No journalist should be detained for publishing the truth. Publicising war crimes isn't a crime. Nowhere in the Western world is there a journalist who has been detained like this. This is against international law. No other publisher or editor has been arbitrarily detained like this. It must be stopped. Europe must act.

"Assange did not violate any bail conditions because it's not illegal to go into an embassy and apply for asylum. We urgently need a solution that guarantees his health and safety."

Others recently able to visit Assange include award-winning journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, who has been at the forefront of Assange's defence since late 2010. Pilger subsequently told a "Unity4J" online vigil, broadcast by the *Consortium News* website:

"Julian is a touchstone for opposition to so much of what is happening in our world right now—the rise of fascism, the threat of nuclear war. Of all the cases that demonstrate resistance, there is none like the case of Julian Assange. He needs popular support right now."

The demands made by the UN Working Group and WikiLeaks' supporters highlight the utter perfidy of the Australian government and political and media establishment, which refuses to defend an Australian citizen against US and British persecution.

Over the coming weeks, the Socialist Equality Party in Australia will campaign at workplaces, universities and in working class areas for the broadest possible support and involvement in political demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne in March. The rallies will demand that the Australian government end its complicity in the attack on Assange and immediately intervene to demand that Britain allow him to leave the embassy and return to Australia, if he chooses to do so.

Both the current Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party opposition must give

Assange an unconditional guarantee that Australia will reject any application for his extradition to the US.

The author also recommends:

SEP (Australia) meeting announces rallies in defence of Julian Assange

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