Voices at the London Solidarity Vigil in defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

“We owe so much to Julian Assange and WikiLeaks”

Our reporters
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Cheryl Sanchez is a regular attendee at the Solidarity Vigil that has been maintained outside the Ecuadorean Embassy by the Julian Assange Defence Committee since 2012.

She was attending the vigil because “Julian Assange needs all the support he can get. He has done a great job as a journalist exposing the war crimes of the criminal state of the USA plus her friends. It is important that we come here and stand up for free speech, stand up for journalism, stand up for a publisher who has given us so much information.

“Julian Assange is not a criminal. Julian Assange is an international hero who deserves a Nobel Prize for peace.

“I started coming down here when there were the problems in Venezuela. WikiLeaks has provided all this information and provided safety for whistle-blowers and shared it with us for free. And they have risked their lives for it. I haven’t seen the last person to do that in a long time.

“We had an inclination this was going on but when he gave us all that information, now we know how far back it has been going and what lengths they [the imperialist powers] will go to protect their crimes. And we know they are doing this up to this day. They are doing it in Syria, in Venezuela.”

Asked her thoughts on the jailing of Chelsea Manning, Cheryl said, “Chelsea Manning is a very honourable person who has decided not to give false accusation and false witness on WikiLeaks. She knows that if she did, she could never live with herself. She is a hero. She knows this is a trip-up to trick her into selling out.”

Asked her view on growing support internationally for Assange and Manning, Cheryl said, “I think people are now getting the facts and not the fake news. There are now a lot of outlets online to get real information, like the *World Socialist Web Site* … and then there is Unity4J every Friday night. There is [journalist] John Pilger still shouting out, so I think there is a rise of real journalism online and it has brought back the fight and struggle back to the forefront again.”

Asked why she thought Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and other politicians who claim to defend democratic rights have not spoken out in defence of Assange, she replied, “Their careers.” She added, “I think he can’t do these things because if he does, he may just lose the leadership of the Labour Party. It seems like the Labour Party just cannot get rid of the Blairites and all the deep-state people. Blair is still there hovering around in the background like Dracula and they are all dancing to the tune of Israel and the Zionist lobby. Unless they can get free of the Blairites, I think that party will end up getting dissolved.

“I think there have to be more protests outside the US and Australian embassies to let them know that we know they are all complicit in trying to frame up Julian Assange. They are trying to get him in America under the Espionage Act of 1917. It is ‘lawfare,’ using the law as a weapon.

“We have to get active, reject the fake TV news and get real news and act upon that. If people are asleep they can get away with a lot, but if we are awake they cannot. We have to keep fighting.”

Natalie is a mother who came to the embassy a few months ago to support Assange. She came from Wales to support Saturday’s vigil. “It’s a shame the mainstream media won’t cover it. They don’t want him free is my feeling. I first found out in 2010 about WikiLeaks with the Collateral Murder video.”

Asked her thoughts on Chelsea Manning’s jailing, she said, “It’s shocking as the West is supposed to be free. I think all we can try to do is make more noise.” Asked why she chose her banner, she said, “I’m so over a surveillance state. Whatever happened to privacy?”

Paul is from London and said, “I’m here because we have a political prisoner who has been effectively denied his liberty in the centre of London for almost 10 years. His position has already been made clear by the UN Special Rapporteur for several years that there is absolutely no excuse for his effective detention. His conditions of life are being made worse and absolutely intolerable. It is disgraceful and it saddens me that we don’t have people [here] every single day.

“I came to the last rally in August. I had to come here again as I feel so strongly about it. Although I’m not a member of the Socialist Equality Party, I’m very much in sympathy with everything they stand for. I saw the advert for this on the WSWS. It’s the most important thing I could be doing.

“We owe so much to Julian Assange and Wikileaks. Our

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understanding of the world would be so much poorer had it not been for the work of WikiLeaks over the years.

"I'm aware of the rallies in Australia too and I'm really glad there is an upsurge of support there. I read the recent piece by John Pilger on what it is like to visit him and the conditions are just appalling, the way that everything they say is spied on."

Asked his thoughts on the jailing of Chelsea Manning, Paul said, "It's extraordinarily courageous" and a "very brave and remarkable gesture on her part. It's not something she could take lightly given that she had already spent years in jail. She is writing her name in history … and she will get out again and continue fighting as we all must. We have to oppose these dreadful wars and all this secret stuff being done in our name with our tax money, like the undermining of legitimate governments.

"The idea of a secret grand jury [that Manning refused to give evidence before] is just weird. Justice that isn't seen to be done is not justice. Anyone is supposed to be able to walk into any court room, as a member of the public and observe. That is a democratic right. No one is under an obligation to testify in a way that might incriminate themselves. That is a basic part of our criminal law and has been for hundreds of years.

"The rights of the citizens in law, constitutional rights are just as important. People lose sight of the fact that there is supposed to be a process of justice. There is no process of justice as far as Julian Assange is concerned. Justice is being perverted. It's so clear, especially after what has happened to Chelsea Manning, that the whole purpose is to get him to the US to make him face some kind of a trial to possibly lock him away for ever or even to kill him."

Daniel is from Italy and lives in London. He said this was the first time he had attended a protest in defence of Julian Assange. "I am interested in the fate of Julian Assange. Journalists have power to bring news to people and they have great responsibility. They have to bring the truth and not just some garbage to sell. So those journalists who are not doing their job are also helping to keep Julian Assange in here. They are not real journalists. They are just people doing what they told to do." He continued, "That is why you now have more and people getting their news though the non-mainstream media.

"WikiLeaks told the truth about torture taking place in various countries and the real truth about the Iraq War. Because of what WikiLeaks did people are more questioning. I think Venezuela would be getting bombed right now if there weren't people questioning what the US is doing and looking into it. So many lives have been saved already because of WikiLeaks."

Asked his view of the recent rallies in Australia, Daniel said, "They have been very effective, and I think they should be recurring events. We have to protect Assange and get him out because the world is going very bad for everyone.

Jamie Ewing lives in Portugal and said, "It's disgraceful the way the political powers, big money and the media are doing things held illegal by the United Nations, under our noses.

"The more support we generate on the streets in support of Julian Assange, like the yellow vests [in France], the more the government is likely to listen.

"I take my hat off to Chelsea Manning—to have suffered in prison and to take such a stand [refusing to testify against Assange]."

Jamie has little faith in the class justice of the US political establishment, saying, "If Assange is extradited to the US, the judge in Virginia has a 100 percent conviction rate for such cases."

Claire said, "I'm in support of all whistle-blowers. It began with Dean Issacharoff [Israeli soldier who is leading a campaign against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank]."

"I'm a life-long Labour supporter, but I feel like giving my membership up because Corbyn hasn't supported Assange. All his life he has been a speaker for human rights, and it's shocked me he's gone so quiet.

"The anti-Semitism campaign in the Labour Party is taking away your right to express your opinion. I support Palestine."

Peter from Norway is 28. He said that he was attending the vigil "to learn more," and "to see how many other people feel the same way.

"Assange has done so much good, they're saying [the exposures of WikiLeaks] are the only true journalist work in the past period.

"If there's one thing worth demonstrating for, it's free speech. I want to hear what Assange has got to say."

Sara, a young woman, said, "I'm here as a concerned citizen. It took me a long time to figure out that I could do something, even if it's just this small act of showing up in solidarity with other people who believe in freedom, freedom of the press. We can sometimes feel powerless as individuals and I feel like this rally gives us the opportunity to realise some of the power we actually have. If we all participated in society in this way … then we would live in a very different world."

Asked what she thought of the role of the establishment media in the fate of Assange, she said, "It shows how the media can contribute to the persecution of people, it's a tragic situation. It is important that people understand how we must be skeptical of what we're being told in the mainstream press. Here we have someone [Assange] who is providing a wealth of true information, making it available and then leaving it up to us to decide what to make of it. That is the real role of objective journalism. Give us the facts and let us decide.

"I've been following WikiLeaks and Assange for years but only when I came to the embassy and saw with my own eyes did I realise, 'Wow, this is almost unbelievable, how he's being treated.' To think that somebody, for doing the good that they're doing, could be persecuted in this way! When this happens to someone, you have to defend them. I think ordinary citizens, and especially real journalists, ought to be out here.

"The one thing I would say to Chelsea Manning and other whistle-blowers who are courageous enough to do what they do is 'thank you,' because it inspires other people. All power to her that in the face of such terrible injustice she can just stay strong and keep going. I want her to know, there are people supporting you."

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