

# Ecuadorian president threatens to evict Julian Assange from London embassy

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In a clear threat to expel Julian Assange from Ecuador's London embassy, the country's president, Lenín Moreno, declared in an interview yesterday that the WikiLeaks founder had "repeatedly violated the conditions of his asylum." Moreno stated that his government would "take a decision... in the short term" on Assange's circumstances.

The comments are the latest public indication of an advanced conspiracy to force Assange out of the embassy, where he sought political asylum in 2012, and into the clutches of the British and US authorities.

If he leaves the building, or is expelled from it, Assange will be arrested by British authorities on trumped-up bail charges. Assange would likely face extradition to the US over concocted espionage or conspiracy charges, carrying a maximum sentence of life imprisonment or the death penalty, for his role in WikiLeaks' exposure of war crimes, illegal diplomatic intrigues and mass surveillance.

In the interview with the Ecuadorian Radio Broadcasters' Association, Moreno made unsubstantiated and slanderous claims that Assange had been "hacking... private accounts" and "phones." He blamed the WikiLeaks founder for a corruption scandal currently engulfing his government.

Moreno's allegation that Assange had "violated the conditions of his asylum" was a reference to a draconian "protocol" imposed on the WikiLeaks founder by the Ecuadorian government last October, following the shut-off of his internet access and the severe curtailing of his right to receive visitors in March, 2018.

The Ecuadorian president restated the terms of the protocol, forbidding Assange from making any political comments, including about his own plight. Underscoring that Moreno is closely collaborating with

the major powers, *Al Jazeera* reported that he made statements to the effect that Assange "cannot intervene in the politics of other countries, especially those with friendly relations with Ecuador."

The Ecuadorian protocol is a flagrant violation of international law. Assange's status as a political refugee has been upheld by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other international rights organisations. There is no basis in international legislation for the political asylum of a journalist and publisher to be made conditional on his or her silencing.

Through much of the interview, Moreno sought to attribute the deepening crisis of his government to the activities of WikiLeaks and Assange. In February, the contents of Moreno's mobile phone and gmail account were sent to an opposition lawmaker and subsequently published online. The leaks and related documents, dubbed the "INA papers," allegedly implicate Moreno and his closest associates, including his brother, in corruption, perjury and money laundering.

Senior officials in the Ecuadorian government began blaming Assange for the leaks last week. Moreno continued the theme, absurdly declaring: "In WikiLeaks we have seen evidence of spying, intervention in private conversations on phones, including photos of my bedroom, of what I eat, of how my wife and daughters and friends dance."

Today, the Ecuadorian government filed a complaint with the UN Special Rapporteur on Privacy, denouncing WikiLeaks over the corruption scandal. It did so the day before the Rapporteur was due to visit Assange to investigate his claim that Ecuadorian authorities are illegally spying on his communications.

Moreno and the government have not offered any proof for their allegations. They are well aware that

Assange does not have internet access, because the government terminated it in March last year. The only “evidence” of WikiLeaks’ ties to the INA papers, provided by Moreno’s supporters, is that the organisation’s Twitter account, which is not controlled by Assange, tweeted reports and media articles about the revelations.

While Moreno is undoubtedly seeking to scapegoat Assange for his government’s crisis, he is also using the publication of the INA papers as the pretext for escalating long-standing plans to evict the WikiLeaks founder from the London embassy. In the interview, Moreno restated his government’s position that it would be willing to see Assange exit the building provided only that “his life is not endangered.”

Since coming to office in May, 2017, the Moreno regime has moved to renege on the previous Ecuadorian government’s decision to grant Assange asylum. At the same time, it has rapidly expanded relations with the US.

Fidel Narváez, who was Ecuador’s consul to London until 2018, bluntly warned that the interview demonstrated “the government seeks a false pretext to end the asylum and protection of Julian Assange.” Narváez wrote that Moreno was using the INA scandal to “yield to US pressure” on Assange.

Moreno’s comments coincide with a stepped-up US pursuit of the WikiLeaks founder. On March 8, Chelsea Manning was arrested and jailed indefinitely for refusing to testify at a closed-door grand jury hearing aimed at concocting charges against Assange.

Manning, who in 2010 courageously leaked US army war logs and diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks, was imprisoned for seven years under the Obama administration. Now she has been held in solitary confinement by the Trump administration for more than three weeks.

At the same time, the claims of the Democrats, much of the corporate media, and the US intelligence agencies that WikiLeaks collaborated with Donald Trump and Russia in 2016 to deprive Hillary Clinton of the US presidency have been discredited. The Mueller investigation into alleged collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russian government concluded last month without any criminal indictments.

This underscores the fact that the campaign over “Russian interference” was always a fraudulent pretext

for the imposition of sweeping online censorship measures and political repression.

The discrediting of the Democratic Party allegations, however, will not result in any let-up in the campaign against Assange and WikiLeaks. Rather, the Trump administration and its nominal Democratic opponents are increasingly converging in their persecution of dissident publishers and whistleblowers, such as Assange and Manning, and a broader assault on civil liberties.

This is demonstrated by the fact that no figure from the US political establishment has raised a word of protest over the attacks against Assange. The corporate press and all of the official political parties in Britain and Australia have similarly signalled their support for the jailing of Manning and the US-led vendetta targeting Assange.

Representing a tiny corporate and financial elite, all of them see the suppression of free speech and democratic rights as critical to preventing the emergence of a mass political movement of the working class under conditions of a resurgence of the class struggle and widespread hostility to war, austerity and authoritarianism.

Moreno’s statements underscore the urgency of stepping up the fight for Assange’s freedom and for the immediate release of Manning. The Socialist Equality parties in Australia and the US held powerful demonstrations last month to rally workers, students and young people to this crucial fight. We urge all readers of the WSWS who want to take up the struggle to free Assange and Manning to contact us.



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