

In leaked court testimony, Assange denounces his illegal detention

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On Sunday, Cassandra Fairbanks, an online journalist, published an article containing previously unreleased testimony from Julian Assange at a court hearing last October.

The WikiLeaks founder and his lawyers had issued a legal challenge, seeking an urgent injunction to block an Ecuadorian government protocol, imposed earlier that month, which banned him from making any political statements, and placed a series of other restrictions on his asylum. In a highly political decision, the case was dismissed late last year.

Shortly after Fairbanks' article was published on the right-wing *Gateway Pundit* website, a full transcript of the WikiLeaks founder's statement was anonymously uploaded online. A link to the document was tweeted by WikiLeaks, effectively confirming its authenticity.

The release of the testimony came amid heightened dangers facing Assange.

On Friday, WikiLeaks reported that a high-level source within the Ecuadorian government had reported that Assange would be expelled from the country's London embassy "within hours or days" and handed over to British police. While the Ecuadorian regime has denied that it will "imminently" evict Assange, it has not given any guarantee that it will not do so in the future.

Assange's October testimony is particularly significant because it is the only extended statement by the WikiLeaks founder since Ecuador cut off his internet access and communications in March, 2018.

Speaking via video link on October 29, Assange began by outlining the impact of his protracted detention in the embassy building.

"I have been in this embassy without sunlight for six years and essentially isolated from most people for seven months, including electronic communication, the telephone etc, from my young children," he stated.

"That's been a difficult experience and it has also

interfered with my ability to work, to make a living and with my deeply held principles that I have fought for all my life, which is to uphold the right of freedom of expression, the right of people to know, the right of the freedom of the press and for everyone to participate in their society and the broader society."

Assange noted that because of the ban on his communications, he had been unable to "participate in the debates around me." This had resulted in "a climate of libels and fake news that might be expected for someone who has been in the business of exposing very large and very powerful corrupt organisations or organisations that abuse human rights."

The WikiLeaks founder expressed sadness that those denigrating his character included senior representatives of the Ecuadorian government. He was immediately cut off by the presiding judge. Under the draconian provisions of the protocol, Assange was not permitted in court to make statements criticizing the actions of the regime.

Assange then explained that he had sought political asylum from Ecuador in 2012, "after publishing information about the US crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, the most significant revelation ever about those two wars, and the US diplomatic cables."

He noted that the alleged source of the documents, Chelsea Manning, had been "seized, brutally treated in an American prison, and ultimately sentenced to 35 years" under the Obama administration. At the same time, the US and its allies had begun a worldwide investigation into WikiLeaks. "Even my own country Australia, in my view improperly, participated in that investigation," Assange said.

The WikiLeaks founder explained that he had turned to Ecuador because neither the UK nor Sweden would give a guarantee that he would not be extradited to the US, where he likely faces bogus charges for his publishing activities.

The Swedish investigation into concocted allegations of sexual impropriety against Assange was dropped without any charges being laid. Despite this, Britain maintained the threat of arresting Assange on trumped-up bail charges and refused to provide any assurance against extradition to the US. The British authorities spent £13.6 million to spy on Assange and “on besieging this embassy.”

The WikiLeaks founder later read a series of provisions in the Ecuadorian Constitution, upholding freedom of the press, free speech and the right to unimpeded communication.

He then turned to the Ecuadorian government’s decision to terminate his communications in March 2018. He said that the regime had “played a game where it has tried to present these very grave restrictions on my human dignity as if it’s about the internet. It’s not. It’s restricting all my telephone calls.”

Three jammers were installed in the building to suppress Assange’s electronic communications.

Assange declared: “The fact that a government controls a particular piece of space does not mean it can violate its Constitution, can violate UN-mandated rights, that it can engage in punishment without process...”

“It cannot be that a journalist giving their opinions on a social network is effectively considered to be a crime and where they would be expelled and placed in prison, in the UK initially and then in the United States for 45 years to life. That cannot be the case.”

Assange later powerfully stated: “No journalist, no citizen, should accept that what they speak about can be defined from day to day by reasons of political expediency.”

He referenced a split within the Ecuadorian ruling party, pitting supporters of former President Rafael Correa, who had granted Assange asylum, against a faction headed by Lenín Moreno, who assumed the presidency in 2017. The WikiLeaks founder noted that the government had been “weakened” and had “started to lean on the US and the UK.” This had led to an “undue amount of influence by the United States.”

Assange was cut-off by Ecuador’s attorney-general, who hysterically denounced him for “making malicious and perverse insinuations about what Ecuador is doing.”

When Assange was permitted to resume, he reviewed in detail the close collaboration between the Moreno regime and the Trump administration. This included a meeting between Moreno and US Vice President Mike Pence last June which the White House stated had featured a

“constructive conversation” on Assange.

The WikiLeaks founder explained: “What is occurring is not about the Protocol. What has occurred since March 28 is something much more serious. It is the Ecuadorian Government positioning itself in order to violate the asylum. Positioning itself in terms of public discourse.”

Assange stated that the attempts to terminate his asylum had “come on the back” of WikiLeaks’ publication, in early 2017, of Vault 7, a trove of documents from the US Central Intelligence Agency exposing its global hacking and spying operations.

“So let’s not play games here,” Assange said. “The Ecuadorian State, for various political reasons, seeks to violate the law and conduct a public campaign in order to make it acceptable to hand over a persecuted journalist to the United States as a result of pressure, well-documented pressure, from the United States government.”

Assange concluded his testimony by stating that the restrictions imposed upon him were “deep” and “humiliating.” He declared “And it needs to stop. Now.”

Assange’s defiant comments acquire even greater significance amid the heightened threats to expel him from the embassy.

The speech will doubtless be viewed by historians as a powerful defence of democratic principles by a persecuted journalist and publisher who was giving voice to the hostility of millions of workers and young people towards the turn by governments internationally to authoritarianism and war.

It demonstrates the urgency of mobilising the widespread support that exists for the WikiLeaks founder to secure his freedom and to defend all democratic rights.



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