

Despite Assange's ill health, Swedish court rejects delay to hearing

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A Swedish district court this week rejected an application by Julian Assange's lawyers for a June 3 hearing into bogus sexual misconduct allegations to be delayed. The ruling was made despite the fact that the WikiLeaks founder is reportedly too ill to consult with his lawyers and has not received English-language translations of the arrest warrant or underlying evidence against him.

The hearing is to decide whether Sweden will formally detain Assange in absentia.

It follows shortly after the US unveiling 17 additional espionage act charges against Assange, which carry a potential sentence of 170 years in prison. While the US charges are aimed at abolishing freedom of the press and free speech, the Swedish extradition bid is an attempt to blacken Assange's name and provide an alternate route for his dispatch to a US prison.

Per Samuelson, one of Assange's Swedish defence lawyers, told Reuters on Tuesday that he made the request for the hearing to be delayed after meeting with Assange at Britain's Belmarsh Prison on Friday. One of the reasons for the application, he said, was that "Assange's health situation on Friday was such that it was not possible to conduct a normal conversation with him."

"I meant that it should be postponed until I had time to meet again and go through the issues in peace and quiet," Samuelson added. "I suggested no specific date and meant it should be postponed until everything was ready, but the district court has now decided that this won't happen."

There are unconfirmed reports, in the Swedish and Danish-language press, that Assange has been transferred to the hospital ward of the prison.

Stefania Maurizi, an Italian journalist who has collaborated closely with Assange and WikiLeaks for

the past decade, tweeted this morning: "Following the press reports on Julian Assange's health, I just heard he is very unwell and am seriously concerned. It's a real scandal how his health has been undermined by arbitrary detention by Sweden and the UK. I will NOT be silent."

Renata Avila, a prominent human rights and technology lawyer who has also worked with WikiLeaks, wrote: "He needed urgent assistance after his expulsion from the Embassy. Instead, he was not allowed to receive adequate medical treatment."

Avila noted that the Azerbaijani journalist Emin Huseynov had spent roughly one year in Switzerland's Baku embassy to escape political persecution. After this it had taken him "at least a month of treatment to go back to normal." Pointing to the protracted detention of Assange in Ecuador's London embassy, Avila commented "Imagine after 7 years! Brutal."

In 2016, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention determined that Assange had been arbitrarily detained in the Ecuadorian embassy, as a result of the threats of the British police to arrest him on bogus bail offences and the prospect that he would be extradited to the US.

During his time in the embassy, Assange was deprived of direct sunlight and was unable to receive adequate medical care, including treatment for a severe dental infection. Doctors who examined him repeatedly warned that Assange's detention was causing potentially irreversible damage to his health.

Following his conviction on the bail charges, shortly after his arrest on April 11, Assange has been held in harsh conditions at Belmarsh Prison. He is limited to two personal visits per month. There are severe restrictions on his communications.

The conditions he faces are a damning indictment of

those, including a host of journalists at the *Guardian*, who declared for years that Assange could walk out of the embassy and enjoy humane treatment at the hands of the British authorities.

The rejection of the request for the Swedish hearing to be delayed also casts further light on the international legal vendetta to which Assange is being subjected.

According to Swedish publications TT and the *Upsala Nya Tidning*, Samuelson has stated that he is only able to communicate with Assange through personal visits at Belmarsh booked well-in-advance, or via conferences from a law office in London. He is not able to contact Assange from Sweden.

The lawyer also reportedly said that Sweden is proceeding with the June 3 hearing in the Upsalla District Court, despite the fact that the arrest warrant and underlying evidence against Assange will not be translated into English before June 10.

According to the *Upsala Nya Tidning*, Sweden's Deputy Chief Prosecutor Eva-Marie Persson blithely declared that it was only necessary for Assange to be informed of the contents of the warrant, not provided with a copy of it in a language that he can read.

This dismissal of Assange's basic legal rights underscores the politically motivated character of the Swedish proceedings. Persson had previously pushed for the hearing to be convened on May 22, before Assange had even had a chance to speak to his lawyers.

Swedish prosecutors reopened the "preliminary investigation" earlier this month, after it was previously dropped twice over the past eight years. They did not indicate that any new evidence had been obtained.

WikiLeaks lawyers have previously published ample documentation to demonstrate that the allegations against Assange were concocted. Text messages from one of the supposed "victims" in 2010, for instance, stated "I did not want to put any charges against JA" and "it was the police that made up the charges."

In 2017, Swedish prosecutors abandoned the investigation. They had never issued any formal charges. Claims that they could not proceed with the case because Assange was in Ecuador's London embassy were a fraud. Since 2010, Swedish authorities have laid charges in absentia against a number of individuals who are outside the country.

Documents obtained by Italian journalist Maurizi

under freedom of information requests in 2017 and 2018 further discredited the investigation. They demonstrated that the British Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) insisted in 2010 and 2011 that Swedish authorities reject Assange's offer for them to question him in Britain, or via video link, rather than seek an extradition arrest warrant.

They also showed that the Swedes had been considering dropping the investigation as early as 2013. The British CPS insisted that they continue it, with the lead CPS lawyer who handled Assange's case warning "Don't you dare get cold feet!!!"

Other emails, including one from the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) to Swedish prosecutor Marianne Nye, were inexplicably deleted. The FBI has played a central role in the US campaign to destroy WikiLeaks.

The unprecedented international political and legal campaign against Assange underscores the urgent need for workers, students and young people to come to the defence of the WikiLeaks founder. His persecution is aimed at setting a precedent for the suppression of mounting popular opposition to war, inequality and authoritarianism.

The WSWS calls on all defenders of democratic rights in Britain to attend Assange's next hearing over the US extradition request, on Thursday May 30 at Westminster Magistrates Court in London. Contact us to get involved in the crucial fight for Assange's freedom.



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