

Amid grave concerns for his health, Assange transferred to Belmarsh Prison medical wing

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WikiLeaks issued a statement today confirming that its founder Julian Assange has been transferred to the medical ward of Britain's Belmarsh Prison. The media organisation said it has "grave concerns about the state of health of our publisher."

It reported: "During the seven weeks in Belmarsh his health has deteriorated and he has dramatically lost weight. The decision of prison authorities to transfer him to the health ward speaks for itself."

The statement must sound the alarm for all defenders of democratic rights. The British authorities' detention of Assange at Belmarsh Prison, a maximum-security facility dubbed the UK's Guantanamo, is a continuation of the eight-year campaign by the US government and its allies to physically and psychologically destroy the WikiLeaks founder.

It is part of the ongoing denial of Assange's fundamental legal and human rights, aimed at preventing him from mounting any defence against unprecedented US Espionage Act charges over WikiLeaks' exposure of war crimes, mass surveillance operations and global diplomatic conspiracies.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties around the world demand Assange's immediate release from prison.

The WikiLeaks founder must be taken to a hospital, with the best medical care available, provided with doctors selected by himself, his colleagues and lawyers, and allowed to recuperate and fully recover his health.

All those involved in his persecution are fully responsible for the ill-health Assange is suffering and must be held legally accountable for any harm that comes to him.

The broadest mobilisation of workers, students, young people and supporters of civil liberties is required to secure Assange's release.

WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson wrote today: "The people need to voice their condemnation; it is their politicians, their courts, their police & their prisons that are being abused in order to leave this black stain on history. Please act now to avert this shame."

The gravity of Assange's health crisis was revealed by one of his Swedish lawyers, Per Samuelson, on Tuesday.

Samuelson told Reuters and Scandinavian media outlets he had been unable to have a conversation with Assange on Friday, because the WikiLeaks founder was too ill. The further deterioration of Assange's health coincided with last Thursday's unveiling of 17 additional US charges against him, carrying a maximum sentence of 170 years in prison.

Despite Assange's inability to consult with his lawyers, a Swedish district court this week rejected a request that a June 3 hearing over bogus sexual misconduct allegations be delayed until his condition had improved and he had been provided with an English-language copy of the arrest warrant against him.

The ruling was the latest in the political and legal vendetta perpetrated against the WikiLeaks founder. It demonstrates that the revived Swedish "preliminary investigation" is aimed at hindering Assange's defence against US extradition, blackening his name and providing an alternative route for his dispatch to an American prison.

Assange was sent to Belmarsh after being sentenced to 50 weeks in prison on bail charges, just hours after his expulsion from Ecuador's London embassy and arrest by British police on April 11.

The British judge ignored the fact that the bail offense had been effectively resolved years earlier as a

result of Assange's forfeiture of the bail monies, the years he spent detained in the embassy and the ending of the Swedish investigation in 2017.

Despite the minor character of the offense, Assange was placed in the highest security classification of prisoners. He has been held in effective isolation.

In a letter to independent journalist Gordon Dimmack last week, Assange explained that he is allowed only two visits per month, has severe restrictions on phone calls and no access to the internet, laptops or a library necessary for preparing his defence.

Belmarsh is notorious for its brutal conditions. It is where prisoners convicted on the most serious murder charges, and on terrorist offenses, are usually held.

A 2009 report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons noted an "extremely high" amount of force used against prisoners. A large number of detainees reported they had been intimidated or threatened by staff. The inspector's 2018 report said many recommended "improvements" at the facility had not been "embedded" and in some areas "we judged outcomes to have been poorer than last time."

Assange's imprisonment follows the seven years he spent in Ecuador's embassy. UN bodies deemed him arbitrarily detained in the building as a result of British threats to arrest him if he left the embassy, and the prospect of his extradition to the US.

Assange was deprived of access to direct sunlight. The British siege of the embassy prevented him from accessing necessary medical care, resulting in serious health problems, including a severe dental abscess, a frozen shoulder and a persistent cough.

Two doctors who examined Assange in January 2018 warned: "It is our professional opinion that his continued confinement is dangerous physically and mentally to him and a clear infringement of his human right to healthcare." British authorities rejected their calls for him to be provided safe passage to a hospital.

In the final year of his detention at the embassy, beginning in March 2018, Assange's communications were cut off and he was denied the right to receive most visitors. The Ecuadorian authorities, acting at the behest of the US government, transformed the building into a de facto CIA prison, holding Assange in conditions of solitary confinement and spying on his every move on behalf of the US intelligence agencies.

Assange's plight is the sharpest expression of a turn

by governments around the world to authoritarianism and police-state measures.

A host of political forces are responsible. Chief among them are the Democrats, the Republicans and the official establishment in the US, which has viciously pursued the WikiLeaks founder for revealing their crimes against the world's population.

For their part, successive Swedish governments have sought to frame Assange on concocted sexual misconduct allegations, providing a pretext for the deprivation of his liberty. British Conservative governments and the Labour opposition rejected UN rulings upholding Assange's status as a political refugee, enforcing his arbitrary detention for years, before arresting him to facilitate extradition to the US.

The attacks against Assange could not have proceeded without the active support of every Australian government since 2010, Labor and Liberal-National alike. All of them have refused to defend Assange, an Australian journalist and citizen, instead joining the US-led vendetta against him.

The corporate media has played a shameful role, relentlessly slandering Assange, downplaying the threats he faces and solidarising themselves with his state persecutors. A host of organisations that once claimed to defend Assange have abandoned him, including the trade unions and the pseudo-left, signalling their support for imperialist war and repression.

The only social force that can defend Assange is the international working class. Millions of workers, who are being propelled into mass struggles against inequality, austerity and war, rightly view Assange as a hero. His ill-health underscores the urgency of mobilising them. The WSWS calls on workers and youth to support the campaign of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections for the immediate and unconditional release of Assange.



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