

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture warns Julian Assange could die in prison

Kevin Reed
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In a June 1 interview with ABC Radio Adelaide, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer warned that Julian Assange could die in prison if his persecution is not stopped immediately.

Last week, Melzer issued a scathing denunciation of Assange's persecution, calling it "psychological torture."

Reporter Philip Williams asked Melzer, "If your calls are ignored, do you fear that he could actually die in prison?" Melzer replied, "Absolutely, yes. That's a fear that I think is very real ... the cumulative effects of that constant pressure, it will become unpredictable how this will end. What we see is that his health condition is currently deteriorating to the point that he cannot even appear at a court hearing. This is not prosecution; this is persecution and it has to stop here and it has to stop now."

The full radio interview with Melzer can heard here. WikiLeaks publisher and journalist Julian Assange was sentenced to 50 weeks in jail on May 1 by a British court in a vindictive show trial on fabricated charges of "skipping bail." Following his eviction from the Ecuadorian embassy on April 11, where Assange had sought asylum and was effectively detained for seven years, he was arrested by British authorities and is now held in Her Majesty's Prison Belmarsh in southeast London.

Melzer's comment about Assange's dire condition follows a statement he issued on May 31 demanding an immediate end to the "collective persecution" by the United States and its allies.

The UN torture expert visited Assange in Belmarsh on May 9 along with a medical doctor and psychologist in order to evaluate the condition of the heroic journalist. Melzer issued his statement just one week after the US Justice Department announced 17 counts

on charges of violating the Espionage Act—which carry up to 170 years in prison if convicted—and renewed the demand that the WikiLeaks publisher be extradited to the US for prosecution.

Melzer warned that the nine-year "persistent and progressively severe abuse" of Assange by US, British and Ecuadorian authorities and the threat of his being extradited to the US would pose "a real risk of serious violations of his human rights, including his freedom of expression, his right to a fair trial and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Speaking from Geneva during his interview with ABC Radio Adelaide, Melzer reiterated his warning that Assange cannot get a fair trial in the US "in light of the prevalent prejudice against him and the image of the public enemy that has been portrayed over there."

In answering a question from Williams about the role of the Australian government in the unfolding attacks on Assange, Melzer said, "The Australian government has been the glaring absentee in this case from my perspective. I would have expected Australia to take steps to protect their national ... to protect him from this excessive persecution that he is experiencing currently."

Assange is the target of an international campaign of vilification, persecution and silencing due to WikiLeaks' exposure to the people of the world both the war crimes American imperialism and its allies.

Melzer's warning points to the urgent need to organize a struggle to defend Assange. We urge all of our readers to take up this fight .



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