# Julian Assange's father warns WikiLeaks' publisher's health is "declining rapidly" in Belmarsh Prison

**Oscar Grenfell**
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In an interview on August 16 with 3CR, a Melbourne community radio station, Julian Assange's father John Shipton stated that the WikiLeaks founder's health is continuing to deteriorate in Britain's maximum-security Belmarsh Prison.

Shipton revealed that Assange had received a visit from his brother Gabriel several days earlier. "Julian is emaciated and not in tip-top order or health," Shipton said. "He is suffering anxiety. He is still in fighting spirits, but his well-being is declining rapidly."

Shipton said there was a danger that "we will lose Julian" if action is not taken to end his incarceration. His warning followed a statement by world-renowned investigative journalist John Pilger on Twitter earlier this month, who wrote: "Do not forget Julian Assange. Or you will lose him. I saw him in Belmarsh prison and his health has deteriorated…"

Assange's father outlined the draconian conditions in Belmarsh Prison, where Assange has been held since he was dragged from Ecuador's London embassy by British police on April 11.

"Can you believe that Julian, who is a gentle, intellectual sort of fellow gets locked up in a maximum security prison?" he asked the interviewer, WikiLeaks supporter Jacob Grech.

Assange was dispatched to the facility despite being convicted only of a minor British bail offense, which stemmed from his successful claim for political asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy in 2012.

Shipton explained that Assange was "in a cell 20 hours a day and has two social visits a month. Lawyers are allowed there other times. These social visits can be arbitrarily cancelled or reduced in time."

He related that when he travelled from Australia to London two-and-a-half months ago, "we waited and were told that we couldn't come" into the prison for a pre-arranged visit with Assange.

"No reason was given," Shipton said, except that "there were conflicting appointments made with prison doctors to come and see him. So, they use the visiting times to have his medical examiners examine him, which means that a social visit needs to be cancelled."

Shipton, along with a WikiLeaks staff member and Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, returned the following week for another arranged visit. "We waited 46 minutes for Julian to arrive," he said. The prison authorities claimed that they had "forgotten" to notify Assange of the visit, "so they had to go and find him and bring him down."

This resulted in the two-hour visit, which Assange is entitled to, being reduced to just one hour. "To travel all the way from Australia to see Julian and to get only an hour, it seems cruel to me," Shipton said.

Asked by Grech whether he thought this was the result of incompetence, or a deliberate attack on Assange's rights, Shipton answered: "I'm told that often that is done with a well-known prisoner to assert authority over him and over his visitors."

Shipton revealed that the extent of Assange's medical issues, and the conditions of his confinement, had compelled his brother Gabriel to write "a letter to [Australian] Prime Minister Scott Morrison describing Julian's circumstances and health. In it, he asked Scott Morrison to do something urgently, because if not, we will lose Julian."

Assange's father condemned the refusal of successive Australian governments to take any action in defence of the WikiLeaks founder, an Australian citizen

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and journalist. This, he said, stood in stark contrast to the sentiments of ordinary people.

Shipton stated: “Julian in my feeling depends greatly upon the support of Australians, and their support has been unflagging over the years. The government, of course, has taken no notice, and it seems to me, only takes notice of the United States and the United Kingdom, and will willingly sacrifice Julian’s well-being to the demands of the US and the UK.”

Last month, Labor opposition leader Anthony Albanese—and a senior minister in the Labor government that denounced WikiLeaks as “illegal” in 2010 and supported his persecution—agreed to meet with Shipton for 10 minutes. Albanese has said nothing since. Both the Coalition and Labor have treated the pleas for Australian intervention by Assange’s family and friends with contempt and continued their nine-year support for the US-led effort to prosecute him and destroy WikiLeaks.

Shipton noted that this persecution was a result of the publishing activities of WikiLeaks, which had “given us insight into all of the heinous crimes that have unfolded before us in the last 20 years, of country after country destroyed, assassinations, the implantation of spies and second rate politicians who have their affiliations with the ambassador of the US.”

The latest warnings about Assange’s health coincide with the public release of two letters he has sent to supporters since his imprisonment in Belmarsh.

In one, posted to Twitter by Ariyana Love on August 16, Assange wrote: “Thanks Ms Love, it is people like you, great and small, fighting to save my life that keeps me going. We can win this! Don’t let the bastards sacrifice freedom of speech, European democracy and my life on the alter of Brexit.”

In another, written in May but only published last week, Assange stressed the importance of public protests in his defence. He suggested that demonstrations demanding his freedom be held outside the offices of organisations which are “not used to protests or would have difficulty defending against it ideologically,” and listed a number of news publications, including the BBC and *Le Monde*, as possible targets.

Assange wrote: “Protests are very powerful for an office not used to them, even if everyone pretends otherwise.”

*The author recommends:*

*For a worldwide campaign to prevent Julian Assange’s rendition to the US!*

For the formation of a Global Defense Committee to secure his freedom!

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