

UK High Court grants US government right to appeal on Assange extradition

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Stella Moris, the partner of imprisoned WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, spoke outside Britain's High Court yesterday warning he is "still at risk of extradition" after a judge decided the US government can appeal an earlier court ruling that blocked his extradition on health grounds.

The judge also ruled that Assange must remain in prison until the appeal is heard, effectively extending his incarceration for at least many more months.

The ruling underscores the Biden administration's determination to ensure Assange's removal to the US. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, based on excerpts of the judge's ruling supplied by the UK Crown Prosecution Service, the US government offered "assurances" that Assange would not be imprisoned in oppressive conditions and could be permitted to serve any sentence in Australia.

Such assurances are meaningless. Once Assange is in US custody, those pledges will be cast aside. The *Wall Street Journal* reported: "The US said it reserved the right to impose special measures on Mr. Assange, or hold him in a Supermax jail, if 'he were to do something subsequent to the offering of these assurances' that meets the test for applying them."

Assange has been denied bail and remains detained in London's Belmarsh Prison despite a January decision by District Court Judge Vanessa Baraitser denying his extradition to the US. Assange faces trumped-up charges under the Espionage Act over his exposure of war crimes, illegal mass surveillance and torture by the US and its allies. He has been held captive in the UK for a decade.

Baraitser ruled January 4 that Assange's extradition to a US federal prison would be "oppressive" because of his compromised mental health and risk of suicide. The US Department of Justice (DoJ) under President Donald Trump immediately appealed Baraitser's decision. Two days later, Trump mounted a fascist coup attempt in

Washington D.C. The Democrats under Joseph Biden and Kamala Harris have seamlessly continued US imperialism's political vendetta against Assange.

The WikiLeaks publisher is being held in violation of his First Amendment rights to free speech and freedom of the press and in breach of international human rights law.

Britain's High Court has reportedly granted a right of appeal to the US on three grounds. The court will decide whether Baraitser applied the Extradition Act correctly; whether sufficient advance notice was given of the court's decision, and whether "assurances" by the US over mitigating the risk of suicide were properly considered.

A date for the appeal hearing has not been announced, but it will likely take place after the courts' summer recess. This leaves Assange imprisoned at Belmarsh indefinitely in conditions long condemned by doctors and human rights lawyers as "psychological torture."

In a letter sent yesterday to Biden and US Attorney General Merrick Garland by Doctors for Assange, 250 doctors from 35 countries demanded the dropping of all charges against the WikiLeaks publisher. They denounced his ongoing imprisonment due to the US appeal as "amounting to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in the UK."

They noted: "Today, the UK High Court granted the US limited permission to appeal the earlier UK ruling against the U.S. extradition request. Crucially, the High Court did not permit the US to appeal findings based on Assange's medical and psychological status, and affirmed the previous judge's findings regarding his clinical condition... Meanwhile, Mr. Assange continues to suffer serious, life threatening effects of the psychological torture he has been subjected to for more than a decade."

Moris, a human rights lawyer and mother of Assange's two young children, warned yesterday that the High Court's decision meant her partner "is still at risk of

extradition where he faces a 175-year prison sentence and where according to the magistrate he is almost certain to lose his life.”

Her remarks exposed the lawlessness of US efforts to punish Assange, “The case is itself falling apart. The lead witness of the US Department of Justice [Sigurdur Thordarson] now admits that he lied in exchange for immunity from US prosecutors. The lawyers of Julian were spied on, their officers were broken into, even our six-month-old baby was targeted while he was in the embassy.”

Moris explained: “This case is the most vicious attack on global press freedom in history. The US government is accusing a foreign journalist, a foreign publisher who is outside the United States, for publishing true information that incriminated the US military of committing war crimes.

“Julian is a freedom fighter. He fights for freedom from torture, freedom from illegal wars, freedom from surveillance and manipulation. That is what the US government is criminalising. There’s no way to stand up for the First Amendment and defend democracy at the same time that you are prosecuting and imprisoning Julian Assange.”

Moris described the crippling legal costs borne by Assange as he continues his fight for freedom. “Many people don’t know this, but the US government is allowed to appeal and have its costs paid by the UK taxpayer. Julian on the other hand has to fund his defence himself. Even though he won in January and the US government has decided to appeal that decision, Julian has to pay for his legal costs... every aspect of this case is profoundly unjust. Julian is being punished for doing his job as a journalist.”

Earlier yesterday, Moris visited Assange at Belmarsh Prison, accompanied by their eldest son who is four. “Julian is very unwell,” Moris reported afterwards. “Belmarsh prison is a horrible, horrible, place. Just yesterday, another prisoner was found dead in his cell. The suicide rate is three times higher than in other UK prisons. It’s a daily struggle.”

She continued: “He won his case in January. Why is he even in prison? Why is he even being prosecuted? There is no legal case against him. All there is is an indictment based on lies. They recruited a convicted embezzler, a convicted sex criminal [Thordarson] against minors, a man who was diagnosed with sociopathy and that man has now admitted that he lied and that those lies are in the US indictment that is keeping Julian in prison.

“Lies are keeping Julian in prison. And now the abuses are just so monumental, and they just accumulate and at some point, sanity has to kick in. They are criminalising journalism. Just look at the indictment, the criminalising of receiving and communicating true information to the public, that no one denies was in the public interest, that evidence war crimes, that evidence torture, that evidenced illegal rendition.”

Asked for Assange’s reaction to the decision to grant an appeal, Moris replied, “I was able to speak to Julian about the decision. It’s mixed, because on the one hand it’s been six months and we haven’t heard any news, so it’s like an endless Purgatory. But at the same time, it doesn’t end here, and so we have to prepare. We don’t know how long this will go on for, and how long he’ll be imprisoned for in that terrible place.”

The US suggestion that it would consent to Assange being transferred to Australia to serve any jail sentence indicates that the WikiLeaks founder continues to face a multi-state conspiracy by the imperialist powers led by the US, Britain and Australia. These “assurances” are ominous. They are designed to provide the British courts the pretext to extradite Assange despite his medical condition.

No faith can be placed in the sadistic promises and conspiracies of US imperialism and its political accomplices. Assange’s freedom cannot be won via moral appeals to the state. The fight to free Assange must be taken into the working class and fused with its worldwide struggles against the pandemic, austerity, social inequality, and the ever-growing threat of war produced by capitalism.



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