

Julian Assange's Ecuadorian citizenship revoked

Thomas Scripps
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Ecuador has stripped Julian Assange of his citizenship. The move is another outrageous assault on the WikiLeaks founder's democratic rights, made in preparation for his extradition to the United States on charges under the Espionage Act. He is currently held in the UK's Belmarsh maximum security prison, pending a case in the High Court.

The decision to revoke citizenship was confirmed by the Pichincha court for contentious administrative matters last week. At the court, a judge backed the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry's claims that Assange's naturalisation letter contained inconsistencies, different signatures and possibly altered documents, and that fees had gone unpaid.

Assange's lawyer, Carlos Poveda, will appeal the "purely political" decision, which he argued was based on unsubstantiated allegations. He commented, "More than the importance of nationality, it is a matter of respecting rights and following due process in withdrawing nationality."

Assange was not able to appear in the case, nor given the materials needed to prepare. Poveda explained, "From the first hearing we have said that Julian was not summoned legally, the documents must be translated because his language is English and that was not respected in all documents".

When he asked for his client to be present at the hearing via a videolink, the Ecuadorian authorities sent a URL, of no use to Assange who is denied access to a computer and the internet.

Ecuador awarded Assange citizenship in December 2017, after granting him asylum in August 2012. He had taken refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London two months previously, seeking protection from the looming threat of extradition to the United States. The government of Rafael Correa asked the British government to allow Assange safe passage to Ecuador but was refused, with

London threatening to revoke the diplomatic status of Ecuador's embassy and storm the building. This left Assange trapped in conditions the United Nations condemned as arbitrary detention.

During this time, the Ecuadorian government was placed under substantial pressure by the US and, with a shift to the right following the 2017 presidential election of Lenín Moreno, Assange's position in the embassy became increasingly tenuous.

On March 27, 2018, a delegation from US Southern Command visited Ecuador, stating that the purpose of the discussions was to strengthen "security cooperation" and "exchange ideas and reiterate US commitment to the longstanding partnership."

One day later, the Ecuadorian authorities imposed a communications blackout on Assange, blocking any internet or phone contact with the outside world and preventing his friends and supporters from visiting him.

His communications were partially restored in October 2018 under strict, anti-democratic conditions. Assange was required to "comply scrupulously" with a "prohibition" on "activities that could be considered as political and interference in the internal affairs of other States, or that may cause harm to the good relations of Ecuador with any other State." His visitors were required to provide the Ecuadorian authorities with ID details and surrender their mobile phones and other devices—a procedure that was used to facilitate the US-backed surveillance of Assange and his associates, including his lawyers.

The same month, the US House Foreign Affairs Committee sent a letter to Moreno stating, "We are very concerned with Julian Assange's continued presence at your embassy in London and his receipt of Ecuadorian citizenship last year."

The letter made clear that giving up Assange would be necessary for the US "to move forward in collaborating

with your government on a wide array of issues,” from “economic cooperation” to “the possible return of a United States Agency for International Development mission to Ecuador.”

In March 2019, Moreno secured a \$4.2 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, amid a deepening financial crisis and in pursuit of a restructuring of Ecuador’s economy. The former Ecuadorian minister of foreign affairs, Ricardo Patiño, commented afterwards, “The arrest of Assange is part of Lenin Moreno’s agreement with the IMF”. This assessment was echoed by John Polga-Hecimovich of the United States Naval Academy, who explained, “Assange impeded Moreno’s ability to seek technical assistance, international loans, and greater security and commercial cooperation with the United States.”

In April 2019, the Ecuadorian authorities allowed British police to enter the embassy in London and arrest Assange, revoking his asylum and suspending his citizenship. The subsequently published diaries of former Foreign Office minister Sir Alan Duncan revealed that this trampling of international law was the product of “many months of patient negotiation” and watched live in the “Operations Room at the top of the Foreign Office.”

Dragged through a two-year legal travesty, Assange was given a faux reprieve this January when the judge blocked his extradition to the US on the sole grounds that to do so would be “oppressive” due to his mental health. This left the door wide open to a US appeal based on promises to ensure Assange’s safety, which the High Court has agreed to hear.

Extradition expert Nick Vamos predicts the appeal has a high chance of success. By confirming its revocation of citizenship, Ecuador has removed another possible complication.

Assange’s case exposes the democratic pretensions of capitalist governments and parties the world over. US imperialism has swept aside every democratic right and principle of international law and employed every form of intimidation and subterfuge possible in pursuit of its target, all with barely a whisper of protest. Governments have lined up to assist the US, from Sweden’s manufactured sexual assault investigation and Britain’s serving as jailer, to Australia’s abandonment of its own citizen and now Ecuador’s withdrawal of asylum and citizenship.

Successive US governments have also been able to count on the uniform support of the political establishment. The Assange manhunt, begun under

Obama and escalated by Trump, has been continued seamlessly by the Biden administration—a reality belatedly acknowledged by Amnesty International this Monday.

Speaking with long-time WikiLeaks supporter Stefania Maurizi, Amnesty’s Julia Hall explained, “We had some hope early on, when the Biden Administration first took office in January, and we really thought that potentially there could be a review of the case... Then we saw the appeal. It was really quite disappointing, because we did think that possibly there was an opening there, and for reasons that the Administration has not articulated well so far, they have made the decision to pursue.”

In fact, the US has made its reasons clear: the destruction of Assange as a warning and precedent for those who would expose and oppose imperialist crimes.

Highlighting the extreme danger of Assange’s position, Hall said of the United States’ promises that Assange will be well-treated: “when you look at the assurances and you see that the US government reserves the right to put him in a maximum-security facility or to subject him to Special Administrative Measures, based on his conduct, you are not in a state where the prohibition of torture is absolute.”

She continued, “The US has made it easy for other governments to use assurances, but what this really does is undermine the international prohibition on torture.”

The conclusion which must be drawn from these events is that no confidence can be placed in any government or state institution to win Assange’s freedom. This task falls to the international working class, whose developing struggle against world capitalism and imperialism is the only basis on which Assange’s safety, and democratic rights in general, can be secured.



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