

Assange and fiancée challenge British government's refusal to allow them to marry

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Julian Assange's fiancée Stella Moris revealed this week that she and the WikiLeaks founder are launching legal action against the British government and senior authorities at London's Belmarsh Prison over their apparent refusal to allow the couple to wed.

The case is only the latest example of an unending series of attacks on Assange's basic legal and democratic rights, and underscores the vindictive and politically-motivated character of his imprisonment.

The internationally-acclaimed journalist is being held in a maximum-security prison under draconian conditions, not because he has been convicted of a crime, but to facilitate a US extradition request aimed at jailing him for life because WikiLeaks exposed illegal US-led wars and gross human rights violations.

The attempted US prosecution has been condemned as a frontal assault on press freedom by international rights and civil liberties organisations. A UN official has labelled Assange's incarceration as state torture, and medical experts have repeatedly warned that he risks dying behind bars.

Despite all this, in a gratuitous display of bureaucratic cruelty, whose only conceivable aim is to exacerbate Assange's well-documented mental health issues, the British authorities are blocking him from marrying his longtime partner and the mother of his two young children.

Moris, an international human rights lawyer, has reported that on October 7 Assange made a formal request to Belmarsh Prison governor Jenny Louis for agreement that the marriage can proceed. That petition and all other requests have been ignored.

Last month, lawyers also asked that Moris and a registrar be allowed to visit Assange to begin the formal marriage process by completing a notice to wed. Extended lockdowns of the prison have been ended, in line with the British government's broader lifting of COVID safety

measures in the interests of corporate profits, and visits to inmates are again permitted. But that application also has been stonewalled.

The legal case is reportedly directed against Louis, along with Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab, who is also the justice minister, with both given a deadline of November 12 to respond before further action is taken.

According to a *Guardian* article, Louis told Assange's legal team that the matter of his marriage is out of her hands, as she was compelled to direct it to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Assange's lawyers, however, reportedly responded that the CPS has no standing, given that Assange is not charged with any offences in Britain.

In powerful tweets, Moris wrote: "We are suing because creepy elements of the UK government are illegally blocking and delaying our marriage by effectively giving the US government veto power. Our request to marry is now in the hands of the CPS, which acts for the US in #Assangecase."

Moris added: "We have initiated legal action because UK authorities have erected a total and indefinite barrier not only to marrying, but even to beginning the statutory process to marry. This behaviour by the UK government is unfair, irrational and sinister."

As Moris noted, the CPS has represented the American government in the extradition case, despite the fact that the request is tied to a clear political prosecution, banned under the UK-US extradition treaty.

The US case has been definitively exposed as a frame-up and a pseudo-legal veneer for an extraordinary rendition. This included the admission earlier this year by Sigurdur Thordarson, an Icelandic conman, that he provided the US FBI with false testimony against Assange in exchange for immunity from American prosecution. The admitted lies remain in the indictment under which Assange's extradition is sought.

In September, *Yahoo News* published an extensive

report confirming that the US Central Intelligence Agency and the highest levels of the Trump administration discussed illegally kidnapping or assassinating Assange in retaliation for his exposure of American spying operations. Charges were drawn up against the WikiLeaks founder to attempt to justify a CIA rendition.

Assange's family was a central target of the intelligence agencies. While he was a political refugee at the Ecuadorian embassy, the private company managing security there began secretly collaborating with the US authorities in 2017. This featured discussions about how the "extreme measures" against Assange considered at CIA headquarters could be implemented, pervasive spying, and even plans to steal a diaper belonging to one of Assange and Moris's infant children to confirm paternity.

At a London press briefing responding to the *Yahoo* report, Moris said: "It felt like we were prey and because I was the person who was closest to Julian, I felt that I was very clearly a target. I felt that maybe they might beat me up or try to kill me or something to get to Julian because they were desperate to drive him out of the embassy and into Belmarsh prison."

This persecution, in the heart of London, was directly facilitated by the British authorities, including the CPS. Their refusal to grant Assange safe passage out of the embassy, despite the United Nations recognising him as a political refugee, meant he was trapped in the building. The spying operation would have been known to the British government, which according to *Yahoo* gave undertakings that it would block any attempt by Assange to flee the country, even if it meant a shoot-out in London.

At the same time as the CIA operation was underway, the British government was actively lobbying for Ecuador to revoke Assange's asylum, so that UK police could arrest him, and the CPS, together with the judiciary, could try to hand him over to the American state.

In April, *Declassified UK* revealed the extent of the British role in terminating Assange's asylum, based on official documents from the Foreign Office.

In 2018, months before Assange's expulsion, the British government paid over £20,000 to bring the Ecuadorian defence minister and senior officials to the country on two separate trips. In July 2018, Philip Barton, director general of security at the Foreign Office, visited Ecuador for closed-room talks, as did deputy national security adviser for intelligence, Richard Moore, just two weeks before Assange's arrest in April 2019.

The published diaries of Sir Alan Duncan, at the time

British minister for Europe and the Americas, were explicit about the purpose of such meetings.

After speaking with the then Ecuadorian foreign minister in early 2018, Duncan lamented that the South American politician "defends the supposed human rights of Julian Assange." In March, 2018, with a change of administration in Ecuador, he suggested Prime Minister Theresa May "might want to butter up President Moreno" so he would evict Assange.

Shortly after, Duncan wrote: "I think I am nearly there with Ecuador to get Julian Assange out of their London embassy. It's taken months of delicate negotiations, but nearly nearly..."

When Assange was expelled, Duncan went to Ecuador twice to thank Moreno. On the second occasion, his diary entry stated: "Visiting him to say thank you is an essential conclusion to the Assange episode and he exudes goodwill and warmth. He loves the UK, and I gave him a beautiful porcelain plate from the Buckingham Palace gift shop. Job done."

The current ban on Assange's marriage displays the same lawlessness and backroom gangsterism and is no doubt being orchestrated by the same forces. Their intentions to destroy the WikiLeaks founder remain.

These attacks on democratic rights have only been able to proceed because they are either openly or tacitly supported by the entire political establishment, from the Labour Party in Britain, to all the official parties in Australia, where Assange is a citizen.

The ongoing campaign against the WikiLeaks founder is aimed at creating a precedent for frame-ups and victimisations directed against anti-war activity and the growing social and political opposition in the working class. The defeat of this operation is a crucial component of the fight by workers and youth against authoritarianism and censorship.



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