

Sri Lankan action committee holds a successful online meeting in defence of Julian Assange

Our correspondents
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The Action Committee for the Defence of Freedom of Art and Expression (ACDAE) in Sri Lanka held a powerful online public meeting on February 24 to demand the release of Julian Assange. The WikiLeaks founder, who remains in Britain's notorious Belmarsh Prison, has been targeted by the US and other imperialist powers for his exposure of their war crimes, torture and other human rights abuses, mass surveillance, coup plots and state corruption.

Over 50 people, including workers, university students and youth from Sri Lanka and internationally, including India, attended. Several others watched the livestream on the ACDAE's Facebook page. The meeting video has now been watched by over 1,000 people and shared by hundreds of others. The ACDAE was established in August 2019, under the political initiative and guidance of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka.

ACDAE member Parakrama Kuruppu who chaired the meeting, briefly described the struggle being waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for the freedom of Assange.

The opening report was given by ACDAE secretary and SEP Political Committee member Prageeth Aravinda. He emphasised that the fight for Assange's freedom was decisive amid the intensifying US and NATO military operations against Russia over Ukraine and the danger of a world war.

Aravinda said that Britain's High Court's December 2021 ruling that Assange could be extradited to US was "the outcome of a 10-year political conspiracy by the US and its allies to persecute a courageous journalist who has exposed the crimes of the imperialist governments."

Aravinda reviewed the significance and scope of Assange's exposures, citing in particular WikiLeaks' publication of the "Collateral Murder" video which

showed US soldiers in an Apache helicopter indiscriminately firing upon unarmed civilians and journalists in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad in 2007.

"Assange's investigative journalism to bring the reality to the working class is incomparable," Aravinda said.

Next to address the meeting was British SEP assistant national secretary Thomas Scripps, who is playing a key role in the ICFI's struggle for the release of Assange. He quoted United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer, who told a recent press conference that "Assange had been subjected to inhuman treatment and to massive due process violations by the US, British and Swedish states."

The court, Scripps continued, "was not concerned with Assange's clearly abused legal and democratic rights, but with furthering the interests and relationship of British and American imperialism."

The speaker explained that the years-long corporate media slander of Assange was an attempt to cover up and undermine the massive popular support for WikiLeaks. The same role, he said, had been played by the trade unions and the pseudo-left who used identity politics and a fraudulent sexual assault investigation as an excuse to abandon Assange.

Scripps said that Assange was being persecuted because he had carried out some of the most "significant exposures of war crimes perpetrated by US imperialism and its allies, including British imperialism, in history and encouraging a global wave of anti-imperialist sentiment."

Referring to Assange's appeal against the High Court decision, Scripps warned that although the UK Supreme Court had agreed to hear the appeal no faith could be placed in this court or any other legal system. "Assange is a hostage in the class war," he said, "and will only be freed by workers taking up a struggle to defeat their class

enemies.”

Arun Kumar addressed the meeting on behalf of the ICFI supporters’ group in India. He said that the persecution of Assange aimed to intimidate all journalists and whistleblowers. “The exposures of these war crimes and imperialist conspiracies by WikiLeaks have helped the working class understand the predatory geo-political aims of the imperialist powers and the real agenda behind their bogus claims of defending ‘human rights,’ ‘democracy’ and the ‘sovereignty’ of small nations,” he said.

“The persecution of Assange is a part of an escalating attack on democratic rights by governments everywhere in the world—from the Biden administration in the US, to Modi’s BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party]-led regime in India,” Kumar said.

The speaker said that all the parties of the Indian political establishment—the ruling BJP, the opposition Congress and the Stalinists—were maintaining a complete silence about Assange’s persecution, underscoring their contempt for basic democratic rights.

Commenting on the situation in India, Kumar said the country was witnessing a growing resurgence of class struggles against the Modi government’s criminal “corporate profits before lives” policy on COVID-19, austerity measures and increasing attacks on democratic rights, including freedom of speech. He added: “The fight against imperialist war, the defence of democratic rights and the defence of Julian Assange are integral parts of the struggle for world socialism.”

The meeting’s concluding remarks were delivered by ACDAE member and SEP Political Committee member Pani Wijesiriwardene. “This meeting for Assange’s defence plays a vital role in building a global anti-war movement based on the international working class,” he said.

Quoting from the June 2019 *World Socialist Web Site* statement for a Global Defense Committee to secure Assange’s freedom, Wijesiriwardene said, “The aim of this campaign must be to politically arouse and mobilise the international working class—the overwhelming majority of the population and the most powerful social force on the planet—in defense of Julian Assange and, in fact, the democratic and social rights of all workers.”

Wijesiriwardene said pseudo-left claims to be defending democratic rights were bogus and exposed by the fact that they either completely ignored the witch hunt against Assange, or openly supported it.

The speaker quoted from a September 2013 edition of

the *International Viewpoint* published by the Pabloite United Secretariat, which insisted that the frameup claims of sexual assault against Assange and calls that he return to Sweden for questioning were “legitimate.” He also cited false claims by the *Guardian* newspaper in May 2018 that Assange had “violated” the communication system at Ecuadorian Embassy in London where he had political asylum.

Wijesiriwardene said Rajapakse government attacks on democratic rights and the militarisation of its administration were part of a global counter-attack of the bourgeoisie against a growing radicalisation of the working class. This was also indicated in its escalating witch hunts of artists and journalists and seen in the vicious persecutions of poet Ahnaf Jazeem and writer Shakthika Sathkumara.

Following the meeting reports Ahnaf Jazeem spoke in support of the fight to defend Julian Assange and called for his unconditional release. The poet was released on harsh bail conditions on December 15, after being detained for over 18 months on bogus allegations that his poetry incited Muslim extremism.

“Telling the world the truth is not a crime, rather it is the principled act that protects mankind,” he said. “It is time to think again about the information exposed by Assange because the US is provoking a major war against Russia. Democratic rights must be protected. Capitalist oppression must be abolished.”

Concluding the meeting, ACDAE secretary Aravinda thanked all those participating and urged them to join the action committee and the SEP to take up the fight to defend all democratic rights and for Julian Assange’s freedom.



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