

Julian Assange marries Stella Moris in London's Belmarsh prison

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WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was married yesterday to fiancé Stella Moris.

The ceremony took place in Britain's Belmarsh maximum security prison, where Assange has been held for the last three years. He is fighting extradition to the United States on espionage charges which carry a life sentence, for exposing war crimes and human rights abuses carried out by the US government and its allies.

Supporters gathered outside the prison entrance from the early afternoon to welcome Moris. She emerged just after 4pm with her and Julian's sons Max (3) and Gabriel (4), her mother, her father-in-law John Shipton and brother-in-law Gabriel.

Moris, in her wedding gown and veil, holding a bouquet of flowers, faced a cordon of police. It was a jarring sight as photographers jostled to capture images of the small wedding party as police officers held back supporters and the assembled media.

The bride joined well-wishers, stopping to cut a tiered wedding cake provided by a supporter of the Committee to Defend Julian Assange, which organised the celebration outside Belmarsh. After what must have been a wrenching departure from the prison, once the allotted two hours for a family visit were over, her remarks were brief but heartfelt, demonstrating Moris's characteristic courage and dignity in adversity.

"Thank you. I don't know what to say. I'm very happy and I'm very sad. I love Julian with all my heart, and I wish he were here. What we're going through is cruel, inhuman. The love that we have for each other carries us through this situation and any others that will come. He's the most amazing person in the world, he's wonderful and he should be free."

The event was an act of defiance. As Moris explained in a comment published in the *Guardian* the day before, "it is a declaration of love and resilience in

spite of the prison walls, in spite of the political prosecution, in spite of the arbitrary detention, in spite of the harm and harassment inflicted on Julian and our family."

By holding and publicising their wedding, Moris said, they were fighting back against the British state's efforts to keep Assange "invisible to the public at all costs", to make him "disappear from public consciousness."

Extraordinary and cruel lengths have been gone to in order to isolate Assange from the huge popular sympathy generated by WikiLeaks with its unflinching exposures of government crimes. He was held incommunicado in his final months of asylum in 2019, in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, before being taken to Belmarsh, and has been barred from all but a token presence in his own court hearings. Multiple requests for bail, even under stringent conditions of house arrest, have been refused.

Last year, the prison authorities attempted to block the wedding taking place at all. A formal request for a wedding was sent to Belmarsh on October 7, after previous enquiries by the couple, and a few days later Assange's lawyers requested permission for Moris and a registrar to visit the prison to make the necessary arrangements. For weeks there was no response. Prison governor Jenny Louis eventually wrote that the request had been referred to the Crown Prosecution Service, representing the US government in this case.

Moris commented, "It's galling that the agency that represents the country that has been plotting to kill Julian, that is psychologically torturing him and hounding him, is the one who is deciding whether we can get married."

Assange and Moris ultimately had to threaten legal action against Louis and Justice Secretary Dominic

Raab for infringing their human rights by creating a “total and indefinite barrier not only to marrying, but even to beginning the statutory process to marry.” The couple were granted permission shortly before the notice period of their legal action expired.

Grudgingly agreed, the ceremony yesterday was tightly controlled. Only six witnesses were allowed to attend the event. Moris explained further in her *Guardian* comment, “Behind the scenes we have been locked in a dispute with the Ministry of Justice and prison authorities, who have denied our proposed witnesses because they are journalists; and who have denied our proposed photographer because he also works as a press photographer, even though they would all attend in a private capacity.”

According to the prison, these individuals would have posed a “security risk”. Moris pointedly notes, “Belmarsh regularly permits photography. Tommy Robinson [the British fascist leader] and other convicted prisoners were allowed to be interviewed on camera when ITV filmed inside the prison.”

One of the denied witnesses was Scottish journalist and former UK ambassador Craig Murray. He joined the event outside the prison.

Speaking to reporters, Murray said of his last-minute exclusion, “It’s a part of the ongoing mental torture that even on this happiest day they will at the last moment strike off guests from his guestlist, just to mess him about. Just to try and make things as unpleasant as they can make them.”

He described Assange’s marriage to Moris as “a real triumph of hope and love in extreme circumstances. This is a man who is facing the prospect that he will never be able to live with his wife and family...”

“I think that this is a real victory for Julian. He has had to fight to assert his rights to get married, even though he plainly has that right.”

Murray commented on the fact that a press photographer had been barred from Assange’s guest list despite making clear he was attending in a personal capacity, “The entire wedding will of course be photographed and surveilled for every single moment and probably from several different angles secretly, by the security state and not by a wedding photographer.

Asked why authorities were too scared to allow even a photo of Assange on his wedding day, Murray replied, “They don’t want him to have any kind of

sympathetic media coverage. That’s why they are scared of a wedding photo and of me just writing an account of what it felt like to be there.”

The wedding was held less than two weeks after the UK Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal from Assange’s lawyers against an earlier High Court ruling ordering his extradition to the US. He retains the right to make various other appeals, but there is no guarantee the relevant courts will agree to hear them. If they refuse, his extradition could take place in a matter of months.

In the face of this relentless campaign, Assange and his family continue to show immense courage. Their fortitude is giving his supporters every opportunity to build a campaign to secure his freedom.

That campaign must urgently find mass support. It cannot do so through appeals to the corporate media, who themselves bear primary responsibility for the isolation, through smears and silences, of the WikiLeaks founder. Nor is there a route to popular backing through figures in the trade unions and “lefts” in the Labour Party, none of whom were in attendance yesterday and who in any case represent no significant forces outside of a thin layer of the middle class and the union bureaucracy.

The campaign to free Assange must instead be built through a direct turn to the international working class, as it comes forward in struggle against its governments over collapsing living standards, cuts to social spending, authoritarianism and the growing danger of war. Only by reconnecting Assange with a mass movement of workers and the oppressed masses around the world against dictatorship and imperialism can his persecution be ended and his torturers brought to justice.



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