

Doctors' orders to UK Home Secretary Priti Patel: "Do not extradite Assange"

Laura Tiernan
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More than 300 doctors from 35 countries have written to UK Home Secretary Priti Patel calling on her to block the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States and demanding his freedom. Patel, a ferocious opponent of WikiLeaks, is expected to rule on his extradition by Friday June 17.

In a letter sent last Friday, Doctors for Assange told Patel that approving his extradition would be "medically and ethically unacceptable". Assange faces 18 charges under the Espionage Act with a 175-year prison sentence for his role as a journalist and publisher exposing war crimes committed by the US government in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Assange has been imprisoned for exactly 10 years this Sunday, first under UK house arrest, then inside Ecuador's embassy in London where he was illegally detained by UK authorities who refused to grant him safe passage to Ecuador. Since April 2019, he has been detained in London's Belmarsh maximum security prison despite having committed no crime under UK law.

The Australian government has refused to intercede on Assange's behalf, a stance maintained by newly elected Labour Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Assange is an Australian citizen, with a wife and two young children in Britain.

In their letter to Patel, Doctors for Assange point to Assange's worsening medical condition, "Predictably, Mr Assange's health has since continued to deteriorate in your custody. In October 2021 Mr. Assange suffered a 'mini-stroke'. This dangerous deterioration of Mr Assange's health underscores the medical concern that the chronic stress caused by his harsh prison conditions, as well as his justified fear of the conditions that he would face in the case of extradition, leaves Mr Assange vulnerable to cardiovascular events."

The doctors continued, "This dramatic deterioration of Mr Assange's health has not yet been considered in his extradition proceedings. The US assurances accepted by the High Court, therefore, which would form the basis of any extradition approval, are founded upon outdated medical information, rendering them obsolete."

In January 2021, district court judge Vanessa Baraitser ruled that Assange could not be extradited to the United States on mental health grounds, acknowledging that the WikiLeaks founder was at severe risk of suicide. Her decision was later overturned on appeal by the US government, with Britain's High Court judges accepting empty "assurances" that Assange would not be subject to oppressive prison conditions.

The doctors warn Patel in their letter, "Under conditions in which the UK legal system has failed to take Mr Assange's current health status into account, no valid decision to approve his extradition may be made, by you or anyone else. Should he come to harm in the US under these circumstances it is you, Home Secretary, who will be left holding the responsibility for that negligent outcome. The extradition of a person with such compromised health, moreover, is medically and ethically unacceptable."

Patel's decision to extradite is virtually a foregone conclusion. She is currently spearheading efforts to push through sweeping revisions to the Official Secrets Act, inspired by the Assange precedent, that will be used to crackdown on national security journalism. The revised Act, whose second reading took place last week, empowers the state to imprison journalists who reveal classified information deemed to be in the UK's national interest.

Patel is also tearing up international human rights law

regarding the treatment of refugees, commencing barbaric transportations this week to camps in Rwanda, a policy condemned by human rights groups worldwide and survivors of the Holocaust.

It is the doctors' second letter sent to Patel. In November 2019, they sounded the alarm over Assange's worsening health, calling for his transfer from Belmarsh prison to a university teaching hospital for urgent medical assessment and treatment. The doctors cited the assessment of United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer and visiting doctors that Assange was a victim of "prolonged psychological torture".

Patel's office had replied with a media statement declaring, "The allegations Mr. Assange was subjected to torture are unfounded and wholly false. The UK is committed to upholding the rule of law, and ensuring that no one is ever above it."

Warnings by Doctors for Assange since 2019 were confirmed during extradition hearings in 2020, when expert medical witnesses testified to the disastrous impact of relentless state persecution and incarceration on Assange's mental and physical health. These impacts have only grown in severity as one after another legal avenue for appeal has been closed off.

Concluding Friday's letter to Patel, Doctors for Assange note the "assurances" of the US government that Assange would not be treated inhumanely "are worthless given their record of pursuit, persecution and plotted murder of Mr Assange in retaliation for his public interest journalism, quite apart from the fact that the US government reserves the right to subject Mr Assange to the very conditions, namely, 'Special Administrative Measures', that would be inhuman."

Last Thursday, Assange's lawyer Jennifer Robinson announced a successful outcome to legal action she initiated in 2016 in the European Court of Human Rights. The UK government reached a settlement, admitting there was reasonable cause to believe that Robinson was subject to surveillance as a legal representative for Assange. Robinson explained, "the UK government has now admitted that its surveillance and information sharing arrangements with US violated my rights. That includes in relation to the protection of confidential journalistic material.

"This follows a pattern of unlawful spying on Julian Assange and his legal team, and it raises grave concerns

about government interference with journalistic material and privilege."

Evidence that Assange's privileged communications with lawyers and doctors were systematically violated has been submitted repeatedly to courts in the UK, along with evidence exposing CIA plans to kidnap and assassinate Assange. Britain's judiciary had clear grounds to dismiss the entire frame-up case against him, granting Assange compensation for the irreparable trauma and deprivation of liberty he has suffered. But the High Court rubberstamped every illegal act.

A media blackout of the doctors' letter has been in place today, with not a single major outlet reporting their plea for his freedom. The media's decade-long campaign of character assassination against Assange, led by the *Guardian* and *New York Times*, is reinforced by a wall of silence aimed at facilitating his extradition and preventing any challenge to the outrageous propaganda being used to drag the world's population into war against Russia and China.

Britain's media, political establishment and judiciary have overseen an extra-legal conspiracy to make an example of Assange and tear up centuries-old legal and democratic rights. Their actions in crushing a journalist who courageously exposed war crimes, including rendition, torture, and the indiscriminate mass killing of civilians is itself a historic crime. Assange's fate rests upon the intervention of the working class, the broad mass of the population, to demand his immediate and unconditional freedom.



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