

Imperialist leaders cover up illegal detention of Julian Assange on World Press Freedom Day

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5 May 2024

Each year the United Nations hosts World Press Freedom Day on May 3 and, according to the official statement, the day is, “dedicated to the importance of journalism and freedom of expression in the context of the current global environmental crisis.”

Among the top objectives of the 31st edition of the event, hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is “Preventing and protecting against crimes committed against journalists,” and “Ensuring the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of scientific research, and access to key sources of information, in addition to combating dis-/misinformation through journalism.”

The leaders of world imperialism and their lackeys in the corporate media used Friday’s World Press Freedom Day to engage in hypocrisy and lying in order to cover up their collective responsibility for unprecedented attacks on journalists around the world, as they lurch toward a new world war.

The high point of this hypocrisy is their silence on and support for the illegal imprisonment of Julian Assange, the founder and publisher of WikiLeaks, who is currently sitting at HM Prison Belmarsh in London awaiting a decision on his extradition to the US. In his groundbreaking work as a journalist at WikiLeaks, which began in 2006, Assange exposed the war crimes and the state and corporate corruption in the service of imperialist conquest and capitalist profits internationally.

Assange has been held in Britain for more than five years in response to a US government extradition demand that he stand trial on charges under the Espionage Act of 1917 which could bring a sentence of up to 175 years in prison.

As pointed out by the wife of the imprisoned journalist, Stella Assange, on Twitter/X, “Tomorrow is World Press Freedom Day. The world’s most consequential journalist is in prison. Speak up. And show up on May 20th.” Assange is scheduled for his next court hearing in London on May 20 where a decision on extradition may be rendered by the British High Court.

Two weeks earlier, the US government issued the entirely untrustworthy assurance that, if extradited to the US, Assange will have the right to a First Amendment and free speech defense and that no death penalty charges will be brought against him.

Responding to these claims, Stella Assange described them as “blatant weasel words,” and further stated, “The diplomatic note does nothing to relieve our family’s extreme distress about his future—his grim expectation of spending the rest of his life in isolation in US prison for publishing award-winning journalism.”

In a cynical statement released by the White House for World Press Freedom Day, US President Joe Biden said, “Journalism should not be a crime anywhere on Earth,” and the US “calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all journalists who have been put behind bars for simply doing their jobs.”

President Biden is responsible for the criminal detention of Julian Assange by the British government for no other reason than being a journalist. In total, Julian Assange has been in detention or house arrest illegally for fourteen years. Biden’s World Press Freedom Day statement followed by less than a week, the White House Correspondents’ Association dinner at which Assange was also not mentioned.

Although he did not issue a statement on May 3, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak delivered the opening keynote to the Society of Editors 25th anniversary conference in London on April 30. Sunak said that journalists and politicians will “always clash,” but claimed he saw the importance of the media industry in holding power to account.

Sunak went on, “It’s your job to hold us to account, and for all we might clash, I know how important your role is. So please keep doing what you’re doing, constantly questioning, investigating and seeking the truth. Because as long as the British media thrives, so will British democracy.” Of course, Sunak did not mention that WikiLeaks held the US and UK governments “to account” for their crimes and that is why Julian Assange is sitting in prison.

In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued a contemptible statement saying journalists “are the bedrock of our democracy,” and “Canada will always stand up for journalists in the defence of media freedom and against misinformation and disinformation. Journalists must be able to do their jobs—free from threat or intimidation.”

Trudeau could not mention Julian Assange in connection with these words because WikiLeaks actually told the truth and challenged the misinformation and disinformation spread by imperialist government’s, including the regime in Ottawa.

Meanwhile, the Israeli government’s murder of journalists in Gaza, who have exposed the lies and war crimes of the Zionist regime against Palestinians, was barely referred to on World Press Freedom Day. According to the Gaza media office, more than 140 journalists and media workers are among the 34,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza and the West Bank since the onset of Israel’s ethnic cleansing operation. That is an average of five journalists killed each week during the genocide.

Al Jazeera published a report on Tuesday evening that said World Press Freedom Day 2024 is “being marked today at a particularly perilous time for journalists globally, with Israel’s war on Gaza becoming the deadliest conflict for journalists and media workers.”

The report continues, “On January 7, Hamza

Dahdouh, the eldest son of Al Jazeera’s Gaza bureau chief, Wael Dahdouh, was killed by an Israeli missile in Khan Younis. Hamza, who was a journalist like his father, was in a vehicle near al-Mawasi, a supposedly safe area that Israel designated, with another journalist, Mustafa Thuraya, who was also killed in the attack.

“According to reports from Al Jazeera correspondents, Hamza and Mustafa’s vehicle was targeted as they were trying to interview civilians displaced by previous bombings.”



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