

Swedish prosecutor files formal request for Assange arrest over rape allegation



Stockholm, May 21 (RHC)-- Swedish prosecutors have filed a request for the detention of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, a week after reopening a case on a rape allegation against him.

Deputy Chief Prosecutor Eva-Marie Persson said on Monday that she “request[s] the District Court to detain Assange in his absence, on probable cause suspected for rape.” She said she would then issue a European arrest warrant for Assange to be surrendered to Sweden if the court decided to detain him.

The court order, if granted, would be the first step for the extradition of Assange from the UK, where he is already serving a 50-week sentence for skipping bail as the U.S. also seeks his extradition.

Assange, an Australian national, was hauled out of the Ecuadorean Embassy in London last month by the UK police and promptly taken into custody when Quito abruptly stripped him of his refugee status, seven years after he sought refuge at the mission to avoid extradition in an earlier Swedish investigation into the same rape case.

The case was dropped in 2017 with no charges being brought against Assange because the Swedish judicial officials were not able to proceed while the Australian national remained in London.

Following Assange's arrest in the UK, a lawyer for a woman involved in the case asked for the investigation to be resumed. The journalist had also faced a probe surrounding a second sex-related allegation, which was dropped in 2015 because time had run out. Assange has denied both allegations.

A lawyer representing Assange in Sweden, however, said he would tell the court it could not investigate the prosecutor's request until he had conferred with his client and learned whether or not he wished to oppose a detention order. "Since he is in prison in England, it has so far not been possible even to speak to him by telephone," Reuters quoted Per Samuelson as saying.

The UK courts will have to rule on the extradition requests from both Sweden and the United States. A U.S. judge has given Washington a deadline of June 12th to outline its case against Assange. The development in Sweden has cast doubt on which side of the world Assange will eventually be sent for trial.

The 47-year-old Australian computer programmer could be extradited to the US to be prosecuted for publishing classified documents that were leaked by American whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

He is accused in the US of what prosecutors refer to as conspiring with Manning to commit "one of the largest compromises of classified information in the history of the United States."

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