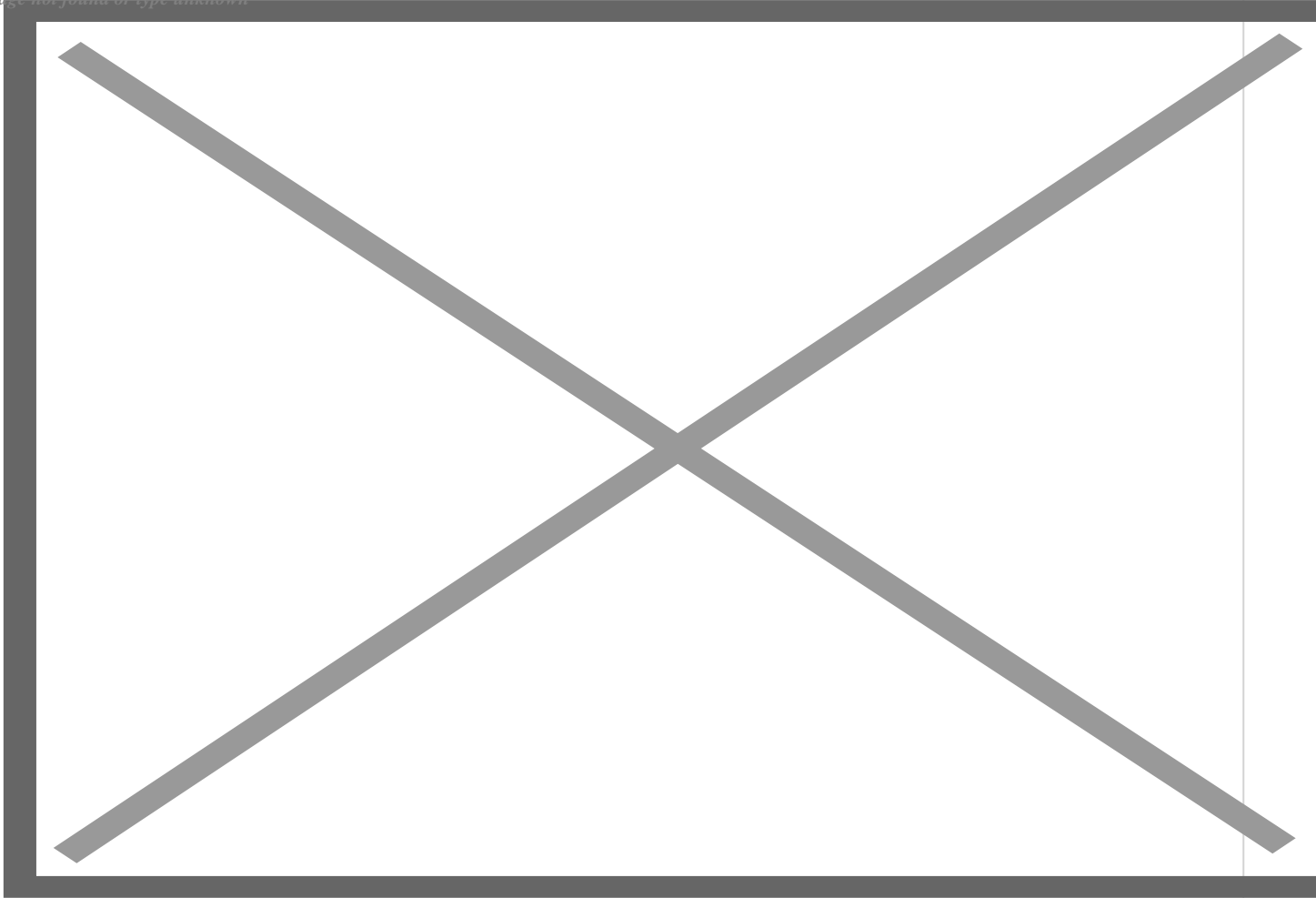


Julian Assange lodges UK appeal against extradition

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Protesters ride on a bus during a 'Free Assange' demonstration to mark WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's birthday, in London, Britain [John Sibley/Reuters]

London, July 1 (RHC)-- WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange has appealed to the High Court in London to block his extradition to the United States to face criminal charges, his brother has said, the latest step in his legal battle that has dragged on for more than 10 years.

Australian-born Assange, 50, is wanted by U.S. authorities on 18 counts, including a spying charge, relating to WikiLeaks' release of vast troves of confidential US military records and diplomatic cables

which Washington said had put lives in danger.

Last month, UK Home Secretary Priti Patel approved Assange's extradition, with her office saying British courts had concluded his extradition would not be incompatible with his human rights, and that he would be treated appropriately.

Assange's legal team lodged an appeal on Friday against that decision at the High Court, his brother Gabriel Shipton confirmed. The court must give its approval for the appeal to be heard, but it is likely the legal case will take months to conclude. "We also urge the Australian government to intervene immediately in the case to end this nightmare," Shipton told the Reuters news agency.

On Friday Assange's wife, Stella, was among dozens of people who demonstrated outside Britain's interior ministry to demand his release.

The saga began at the end of 2010 when Sweden sought Assange's extradition from Britain over allegations of sex crimes. When he lost that case in 2012, he fled to the Ecuadorean embassy in London, where he lived for seven years.

When he was forcibly removed from the embassy in April 2019, he was jailed for breaching British bail conditions although the Swedish case against him had been dropped. He has been fighting extradition to the US since June 2019 and remains in jail.

"We're going to fight this. We're going to use every appeal avenue," his wife Stella told reporters after Patel approved his extradition. He could face decades in jail if found guilty, but supporters portray him as a martyr to press freedom.

"He's been in prison for telling the truth," supporter Gloria Wildman, 79, told the AFP news agency at Friday's protest. "If Julian Assange is not free, neither are we, none of us is free," she said.

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