

Julian Assange's brother makes plea to Anthony Albanese as U.S. extradition looms



A composite of Julian Assange and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

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Brisbane, July 28 (RHC)-- The prime minister is meeting with high-level U.S. officials in Brisbane.

Supporters of Julian Assange are urging him to raise the issue of the WikiLeaks founder's detention this weekend.

The United States is seeking to extradite Wikileaks founder Julian Assange over the leak of thousands of documents in 2010 about US operations in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

KEY POINTS

* US ambassador to Australia Caroline Kennedy says the case of Julian Assange has been raised at the highest level.

* The US is seeking to extradite Julian Assange over the 2010 leak of files on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

* He is being held in Belmarsh prison in London as he challenges the extradition request.

Julian Assange supporters are urging Australia's senior ministers to push for the WikiLeaks founder's release from prison when they meet officials from the United States.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese joined his defense and foreign affairs ministers at meetings with the US secretary of state and defence secretary in Brisbane on Friday. Further meetings will take place over the weekend.

Australia 'not aware' of fresh FBI investigation into Julian Assange

Assange's brother, Gabriel Shipton, said the talks were one of the last face-to-face meetings between the ministers before the 51-year-old faced extradition from England to the U.S. "Julian is inches away from extradition to the USA," Shipton said in a statement.

"The meeting between the secretary of state and the prime minister could be the last chance to put a stop to Julian's nightmare."

Assange has been held in prison in London since 2019, after thousands of documents were leaked in 2010 about US operations in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

In 2021, a British judge ruled that Assange not be extradited to the US due to concerns for his mental health, but the decision was overturned on appeal.

While Albanese has previously raised Assange's plight with US president Joe Biden, Shipton said the case needed to be brought to attention at the latest talks.

"Each day the US administration ignores the Australian public on Julian's freedom it becomes clearer and clearer Australia's true standing in the alliance," he said.

US ambassador says issue raised at highest levels of government

US ambassador to Australia Caroline Kennedy said she understood the concerns raised by Assange supporters.

"For Julian Assange, it means a lot that he has this kind of support, but we're just going to have to see what happens," she told ABC Radio.

"This has been raised at the highest levels of our government, but it is an ongoing legal case, so the Department of Justice is really in charge."

Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Simon Birmingham said relations between the US and Australia would not be damaged if Assange's plight was raised. "No doubt it would be in everybody's best interest to see the matters resolved more expeditiously than has proven to be the case so far," he said.

"Obviously a lot of the delays in the Julian Assange case that has dragged on for so many years have in part been a function of Mr Assange's own decisions, including the very long period of time that he chose to put himself in the Ecuadorian embassy in London and avoid any type of legal proceedings."

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