

Julian Assange supporters hold protest outside U.S. attorney general's home

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Washington, August 21 (RHC)-- Supporters of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange gathered outside Attorney General Merrick Garland's home in Maryland on Sunday for a vigil urging him to drop the charges filed against the Australian journalist for publishing classified U.S. military documents leaked by a whistleblower.

Garland was spotted leaving his residence in a motorcade shortly before 4 p.m. on Sunday, riding by the Assange supporters who set up posters demanding an end to the prosecution. Some at the vigil gave speeches arguing the charges against the journalist are an attack on press freedom.

"I think the Julian Assange case is extremely important," said Martha Allen, director of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press. "We need media, democracy, freedom of the press for the individual, not just the five corporations that pretty much run everything. So this case is crucial for independent media, for freedom of the press, for all of us, not just the rich and the powerful and those running what's

going on in this country and elsewhere ... This is an injustice and it needs to end. Free Julian Assange."

Assange is accused of publishing cables more than a decade ago detailing war crimes committed by the U.S. government in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. The hundreds of thousands of documents, which were leaked to Wikileaks by U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, also exposed instances of the CIA engaging in torture and rendition.

Wikileaks also published its "Collateral Murder" video 13 years ago that showed the U.S. military gunning down civilians in Iraq, including two Reuters journalists.

Assange is currently fighting against extradition to the U.S., where he would face 17 charges for receiving, possessing and communicating classified information to the public under the Espionage Act and one charge alleging a conspiracy to commit computer intrusion. If extradited, he will be tried in Alexandria, Virginia, and could be sentenced to as many as 175 years in an American maximum security prison.

"Freedom worldwide depends on Julian Assange," OpEd News' Dominique Filanowski said at the vigil. "So free Julian and let's get it where he doesn't get extradited. Let's still fight that until the very end. If the inevitable does happen where he is extradited, then we keep fighting it here."

Assange has been held at London's high-security Belmarsh Prison since he was removed from the Ecuadorian Embassy on April 11, 2019, for breaching bail conditions. He had sought asylum at the embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden over allegations he raped two women after Sweden would not ensure he would be protected from extradition to the U.S. Investigations into the sexual assault allegations were eventually dropped.

The Obama administration decided not to indict Assange after Wikileaks published the cables in 2010 because it would have had to also indict journalists from major news outlets who published the materials as well.

Assange was later indicted under the Espionage Act by former President Donald Trump's Justice Department and the Biden administration has continued to pursue his prosecution.

"We care for the human rights of Julian Assange and the persecution he's undergoing. And we care about our First Amendment and press freedom," event organizer Paula Iasella told Fox News Digital. Iasella said vigils by Garland's home have been taking place since 2021. She also said she has been able to hand letters to Secret Service agents, on multiple occasions, to give to the attorney general's counselors.

"My message to Merrick Garland has been the message from day one," she explained. "I pleaded with him. I said, 'You are taking Trump's prosecution and making it your legacy. You're going to destroy your legacy over this press freedom case of the century.' And I said, 'You should drop the charges to save your legacy. You shouldn't be strapped to such a negative thing of prosecuting a journalist under the Espionage Act.'"

Filanowski told Fox News Digital at the vigil that he believes there is a "snowball's chance in hell" that Assange receives justice if he is extradited to the U.S.

"If he does end up getting extradited, which seems like a 99.9% chance that he will, then I don't think he'll get a fair case here," Filanowski said. "He's not going to be able to present any evidence at the trial. Forget the Espionage Act, which prevents you from being able to say like, 'Hey, I did it for the better of humanity so that the public knows, like the crimes that were committed by the United States.' He can't say any of that there."

Last year, editors and publishers with The Guardian, The New York Times, Le Monde, Der Spiegel and El País wrote an open letter calling for the U.S. to end its prosecution of Assange. The news outlets had

worked with the Australian journalist to publish excerpts from the more than 250,000 documents he obtained in the Cablegate leak.

Under the Trump administration, the CIA allegedly had plans to kill Assange over the publication of sensitive agency hacking tools known as "Vault 7," which the agency said represented "the largest data loss in CIA history," Yahoo reported in 2021. The CIA had discussions "at the highest levels" of the administration about plans to assassinate Assange in London, per the report, and had also drawn up kill "sketches" and "options" following orders from then-CIA director Mike Pompeo.

The Yahoo report also revealed the CIA advanced plans to kidnap and rendition Assange and had made a political decision to charge him.

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