

Sixteen U.S. lawmakers call on Joe Biden to free Julian Assange



Washington, November 12 (RHC)-- A group of lawmakers from both sides of the political aisle have written to President Biden, calling for him to drop the U.S. prosecution against Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder who published a tranche of classified military and diplomatic cables.

The lawmakers, who include Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y. and Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., penned the letter to the president with Assange's wife, Stella Assange, posting a copy of it to X.

The letter calls for Biden to end the U.S. extradition request against Julian Assange so he can face charges. Assange has been held at London's high-security Belmarsh Prison since he was removed from the Ecuadorian Embassy in 2019 for breaching bail conditions, and he is contesting U.S. extradition efforts in the British courts.

"As Members of Congress deeply committed to the principles of free speech and freedom of the press, we write to strongly encourage your Administration to withdraw the U.S. extradition request currently pending against Australian publisher Julian Assange and halt all prosecutorial proceedings against him as soon as possible," the letter, dated November 8th, reads.

Assange is facing 17 charges for allegedly receiving, possessing and communicating classified information to the public under the 1917 Espionage Act and one charge alleging a conspiracy to commit computer intrusion. If found guilty, he could be sentenced to up to 175 years in an American maximum-security prison. However, a dropping of the charges could see him freed.

The charges followed the 2010 publication of cables that U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning leaked to WikiLeaks that detailed war crimes committed by the U.S. government in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, detention camp. The materials also exposed instances of the CIA engaging in torture and rendition.

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

They wrote that "deep concerns" about Assange's case have been repeatedly raised by international media outlets, human rights and press freedom advocates and members of Congress.

The lawmakers wrote that the Espionage Act was intended to punish and imprison government employees and contractors who gave state secrets to enemy governments, and not to penalize journalists and whistleblowers.

"It is the duty of journalists to seek out sources, including documentary evidence, in order to report to the public on the activities of government," the letter reads. "The United States must not pursue an unnecessary prosecution that risks criminalizing common journalistic practices and thus chilling the work of the free press."

Reps. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., and James McGovern, D-Mass., headed up the effort and began circulating a draft letter to their colleagues in the House of Representatives last month. Massie has previously sponsored bipartisan legislation to reform the Espionage Act and protect whistleblowers and journalists.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., is the only Senator to sign the letter.

The other signees include Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-N.Y., Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., Rep. Ayanna Pressley, D-Mass., Rep. Greg Casar, D-Texas., Rep. Eric Burlison, R-Mo., Rep. Matthew Rosendale, R-Mt., Rep. Chuy Garcia, D-Ill., and Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wa.

The bipartisan congressional effort to free Assange comes weeks after a delegation of Australian lawmakers visited Washington, D.C., and met with members of Congress, U.S. officials and civil rights groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union and the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, to demand the U.S. drop the charges against Assange.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has repeatedly called on the U.S. in recent months to end the prosecution of Assange.

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