

*Julian Assange's lawyer warns his life is at risk if final UK appeal against extradition to U.S. fails*

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ABC Illawarra / By Nick McLaren and Nick Rheinberge

London, January 11 (RHC)-- Wikileaks founder Julian Assange is at risk of suicide if the UK High Court next month rejects his final appeal against extradition to the United States, his lawyer has warned.

International human rights lawyer Jennifer Robinson says her client is so unwell mentally that he would be unlikely to survive extradition if the High Court does not rule in his favor. Assange remains in London's high-security Belmarsh Prison while facing extradition on charges related to the publication of thousands of diplomatic and military documents in 2010.

He potentially faces up to 175 years in prison over 17 espionage charges and one charge of computer misuse over the leaks. Julian Assange has been detained for a total of more than 13 years.

Ms Robinson, who is visiting family on the NSW South Coast, said more than a decade of detention had taken its toll on the award-winning journalist. Assange spent almost seven years living in the Ecuadorian embassy in central London before it forced him to leave. He has been held in Belmarsh Prison since 2019.

"As a result of the 13 years he's been effectively in prison or under house arrest or some form of restrictions on his liberty inside the Ecuadorian Embassy he is really unwell," Ms Robinson said.

"Because of the treatment he has suffered, he suffers a major depressive illness, he has been diagnosed as being on the [autism] spectrum, and the medical evidence is if he was extradited to the United States those conditions would cause him to commit suicide. "So his life is at risk and I am not exaggerating that."

Assange, now 52, has one last avenue for appeal outside of the U.S., but his lawyer is not counting on it.

"We have our final appeal against his extradition coming up in February and if we fail, if we are not given permission to appeal, that is the end of the road in the UK and he will be extradited," Ms Robinson said.

"We are hoping that the European Court of Human Rights will step in. We will make an application to the European court to try to stop [his extradition] but that's not guaranteed."

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese revealed in late November that he had personally lobbied the US government to drop the charges against Assange. "I have raised this personally with representatives of the United States government," Mr Albanese he told parliament. "My position is clear and has been made clear to the U.S. administration. "I will continue to advocate, as I did recently in meetings that I have held."

In May last year, Mr Albanese told ABC 730 the matter needed to be brought to a conclusion. "It has been too long. And in my view, as I've said before, I see nothing is served from the further incarceration of Mr Assange," he said.

An unlikely coalition of Australian parliamentarians converges on Washington to lobby U.S. decision-makers to drop the legal pursuit of Julian Assange and grant his freedom by Christmas. Last September, a cross-party delegation of Australian politicians travelled to the US to meet with the Justice Department to call for Assange's release.

Ms Robinson described the Australian government's role as "supportive" and said she had been working with government representatives to reach a resolution. "We have been calling on the US to drop the case for years and the Australian government supports bringing Julian home as soon as possible and bringing the case to an end," she said.

"To consider that he faces 175 years in a US prison, in a prison of our ally which purports to bring democracy to the world and have the best free speech protections in the world, it says a lot about democracy in this era."

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