

WikiLeaks says Julian Assange's health has deteriorated in UK prison



London, May 31 (RHC)-- WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has become seriously ill in a prison near the British capital, where he has been held since he was arrested inside the Ecuadorian embassy in early April.

According to WikiLeaks and his lawyer: "During the seven weeks in Belmarsh, his health has continued to deteriorate and he has dramatically lost weight."

A statement by WikiLeaks, the whistle-blowing website which Julian Assange co-founded more than a decade ago, says that there are grave concerns about Assange's health after authorities in Belmarsh had decided to move him to a health ward in the facility.

"The decision of prison authorities to move him to the health ward speaks for itself," said WikiLeaks. The statement came after Assange failed to appear in a hearing on an extradition request from the United States via video link from Belmarsh.

Assange's lawyer also said he was too ill to attend the hearing and respond the questions by Westminster Magistrates' Court. Gareth Peirce said: "He's in fact far from well."

The judge presiding over the case also confirmed that Assange was "not very well" to appear in the hearing by videolink. Human rights campaigners have criticized UK's decision to hold Assange in Belmarsh, a high-security prison normally used for high-profile terrorism convicts.

Assange is currently serving a 50-week sentence for skipping bail in 2012 when he took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London in an attempt to evade a potential extradition to the US.

He is wanted by the U.S. government for breaching laws on confidential data by publishing hundreds of thousands of classified military documents on WikiLeaks.

Assange, who is 47 years old, also faces extradition to Sweden over allegations of sexual assault. Assange could face decades in prison if he is convicted of a total of 18 U.S. criminal counts.

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