

Biden administration files appeal for Assange's extradition

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Washington, February 13 (RHC)-- A U.S. Justice Department official has said the administration of President Joe Biden has appealed a British judge's ruling against the extradition of Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks -- an international, non-profit whistle-blowing organization that was created in Iceland in 2006.

Justice Department spokesman Marc Raimondi said on Friday the appeal filed late Thursday pronounced Washington's desire to have Assange stand trial in the U.S. on espionage over his organization's publication of hundreds of thousands of U.S. military and diplomatic documents over the years.

On January 4, British District Judge Vanessa Baraitser blocked a U.S. request to extradite Assange, saying it would be "oppressive" because of his poor mental health that would raise the risk of suicide if he were sent to the United States for trial. The judge's decision said that U.S. prison facilities were not safe for Assange.

The Justice Department had until Friday to register its stance on Baraitser's January 4 ruling about Assange who has remained under detention by British authorities pending the appeal. "Yes, we filed an appeal and we are continuing to pursue extradition," Raimondi told AFP on Friday.

The U.S. wants the 49-year-old publisher to be extradited and tried for allegedly conspiring with American whistleblower Chelsea Manning in her leak of classified government documents a decade ago. After leaking information about US atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan, Assange took refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and stayed there for seven years until he was arrested by UK police on the embassy's premises in April 2019 and forcefully dragged out of the building.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump had repeatedly expressed his affinity for WikiLeaks during the 2016 campaign, when the whistleblower site played a major role in the run-up to the U.S. presidential election after it published a number of documents leaked from the campaign of then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. But Trump failed to pardon Assange before leaving office on January 20.

"The real tragedy of the Trump presidency is nowhere better demonstrated than in Trump's 180 degree turn away from Wikileaks and its founder Julian Assange," writes Ron Paul. The appeal against Baraitser's decision was moved by the Trump administration.

Biden was pressured by rights groups to drop the case, but his administration carried on the policy of his predecessor and ignored the issues of transparency and media freedom.

Earlier this week dozens of organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International USA and Reporters Without Borders, called on the new U.S. president to drop the case. "Journalists at major news publications regularly speak with sources, ask for clarification or more documentation, and receive and publish documents the government considers secret," they said in an open letter.

"In our view, such a precedent in this case could effectively criminalize these common journalistic practices," they stated.

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