

# *Ecuador Calls on UN Human Rights Groups to Defend WikiLeaks Founder*

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Quito, June 20 (RHC) -- Ecuador Thursday called on the United Nations and other human rights agencies to defend the rights of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

In a joint video press conference with Assange, Ecuadoran Foreign Affairs Minister Ricardo Patino said: "I appeal to the UN agencies in defense of human rights... to all human rights organizations and public opinion in general to defend the rights of Julian Assange."

Assange has been holed up at Ecuador's embassy in London for two years as a result of a failed effort to garner political asylum in the South American country.

While Ecuador granted him asylum in August 2012, the British government has refused to give him "safe conduct" and allow let him leave the country.

Assange's de facto imprisonment "is deteriorating his health and quality of life," said Patino. Assange, who is 42 years old, took refuge at the embassy to avoid being extradited to Sweden, where he is wanted for questioning in two sexual assault cases, on grounds that he would be handed over to U.S. authorities

due to extradition agreements.

The United States is said to have indicted him of espionage and other crimes for his role in revealing, through his anti-secrecy website, thousands of confidential, embarrassing and possibly incriminating documents and videos of covert U.S. political and military action.

Patino condemned the "deafening silence" of international media organizations regarding the plight of Assange, after they were happy to publish in 2010 the diplomatic cables leaked by WikiLeaks.

Ecuador has done its part, said Patino, calling on the international community to "defend the right to freedom of speech." The WikiLeaks founder is "a brave man who dared to disseminate what they wanted to hide," said Patino, adding "Julian Assange could end up paying for his service to humanity with his life."

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